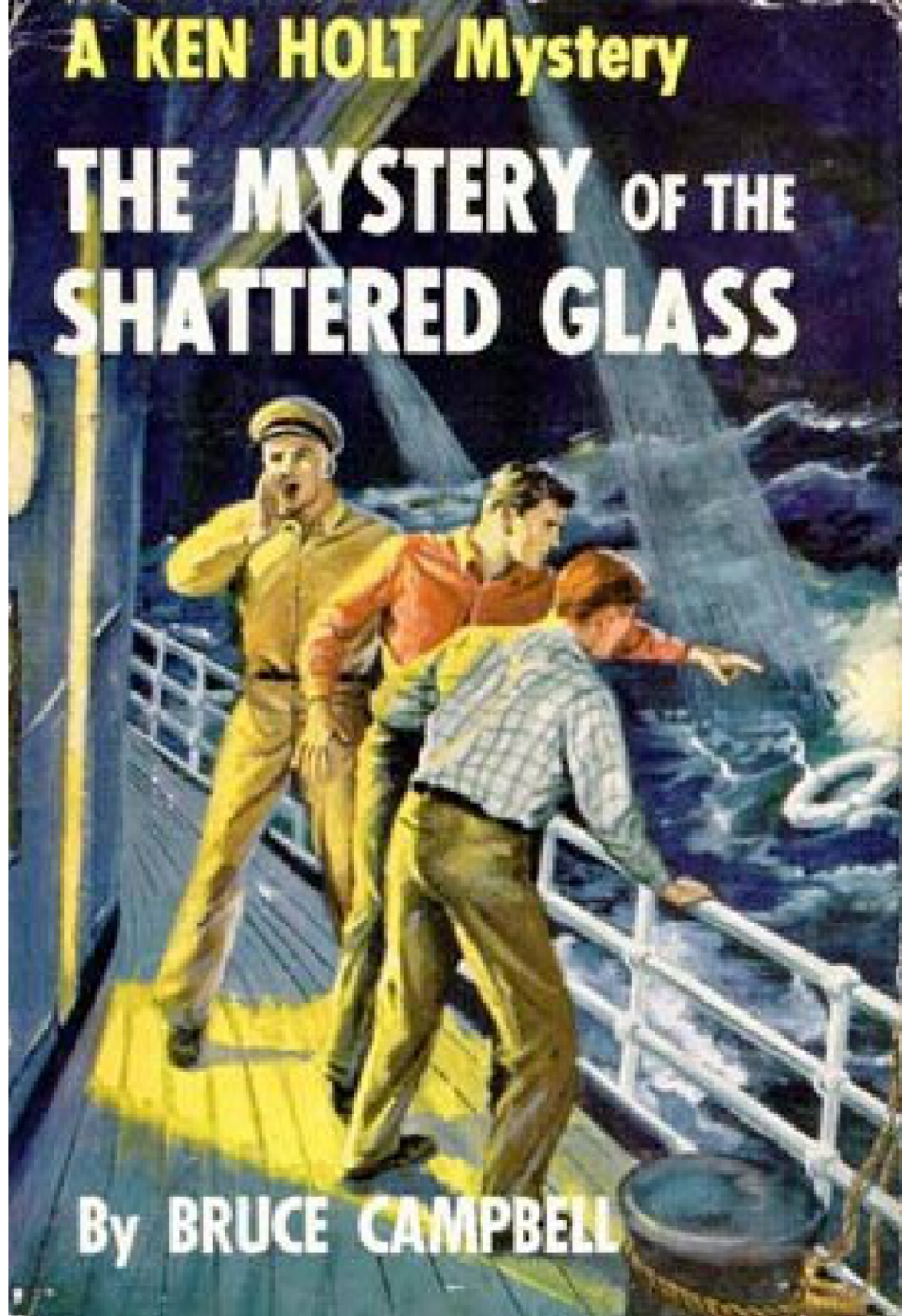


A KEN HOLT Mystery

THE MYSTERY OF THE SHATTERED GLASS

By BRUCE CAMPBELL



THE MYSTERY OF THE SHATTERED GLASS

A KEN HOLT Mystery. No. 13

By Bruce Campbell

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GROSSET & DUNLAP Publishers

NEW YORK

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CHAPTER I

AT SEA

Ken Holt passed the hairbrush once more over a stubborn cowlick, his feet braced against the roll of the ship. The only sound in the snug stateroom was the hiss of air through the ceiling vents. But when he put the brush down on the bureau top, it slid noisily to starboard until it came to rest against the narrow ledge around the glass-covered surface.

Ken found himself thinking, as he did a dozen times a day, that every object in the room, including the ledge-rimmed bureau top, had been skillfully designed for safety and comfort on a rolling sea.

The drawers of the bureau itself locked shut, so that they could not slide forward with a tilt of the ship and dump their contents on the floor. Doors to the stateroom, to its closet, and to its tiny compact bathroom were all equipped with hooks, so that they would not bang back and forth when they were open, and they had tight locks that prevented them from rattling in their frames when they were closed. The three portholes—two facing forward and one in the port bulkhead over Ken's bunk—could be held open by chains, or sealed tightly shut and covered by the heavy iron disks called deadlights. A thermos jug and two glasses were set firmly in brackets on the wall beside the bureau. And the several pieces of baggage belonging to Ken and his friend, Sandy Allen, were all neatly stowed away in the big built-in drawers under the two bunks.

As Ken glanced at Sandy, stretched out on his own bunk, Sandy lowered the book he had been reading. In the light of the small lamp set into the wall above his pillows his red hair glowed as if it were on fire.

"Hmm! Five o'clock already!" Sandy swung his legs off the bunk and stood erect, his better than six-foot frame reaching close to the stateroom's ceiling. He lurched unsteadily around the end of the bunk and shouldered Ken aside from the mirror over the bureau.

For an instant their two reflections stared back at them side by side—Ken's slender and wiry, black-haired and black-eyed, half a head shorter than his friend and looking almost frail beside the redhead's broad-shouldered bulk. But Sandy knew that if Ken hadn't willingly made room for him, it wouldn't have been easy to move the slighter figure. There was steel in Ken's sinewy figure to match his tough endurance.

“You know,” Sandy said, picking up his own comb, “I liked the idea of making this trip by cargo freighter the minute your father suggested it—even before I could be sure the *Helen Rogers*’ pantry would be open at all hours and her refrigerator always stuffed. But after nine days aboard, it is my considered opinion that the pantry and the refrigerator are this ship’s two most attractive features.”

Ken grinned at him from one of the cabin’s two chairs. “You told me ahead of time they would be. That was apparently the only sort of thing you learned from your job as a freighter mess boy that summer.”

“Ah, yes, even in my youth—before knowing you had prematurely aged me—I could already make astute judgments,” Sandy said. “If I do say so myself,” he added modestly. “And I feel that the best way to show my appreciation of the ship’s facilities is—”

Out of long experience Ken could finish the sentence for him. “Is to head for the pantry right now and make yourself a couple of sandwiches to keep you alive until supper is served in exactly half an hour.” He shook his head. “If this steamship line had many passengers like you it would go broke.”

“My good man,” Sandy said loftily, “why not let the company do its own worrying? Anyway, it all averages up. Out of the three other passengers, two of them didn’t eat anything at all the first couple of days. Remember? Mr. and Mrs. Anderson were both sick then. And Mr. Gerard was sick for even longer, and he only picks at his food when he does come to the table.”

“I see. So when you consume a half-dozen snacks every day, you’re just preventing good food from going to waste?”

A knock on their door punctuated his sentence. Sandy called out “Come in,” and Angelo, the white-coated mess steward stuck his head into the cabin.

“Just wanted you to know,” Angelo said with a wide grin, looking directly at Sandy, “that there’s sirloin steak on the menu tonight. Thought I’d tell you, in case you were figuring on stoking up on sandwiches ahead of time.”

“Angelo,” Ken told him, grinning, “you should know by now that steak on the menu, even three times a day, wouldn’t have any effect on this glutton’s appetite for between-meal snacks.”

“Sure. I do.” Angelo nodded. “But cook told me he’s cutting a triple-thick one for Sandy, so I figured—”

“Triple thick, huh?” Sandy repeated thoughtfully, as Angelo paused. “Well, in that case maybe I’ll just have one sandwich now, instead of a couple.”

Angelo and Ken exchanged grins, before Angelo disappeared with a murmured, “Well, don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

“You know,” Ken said, “it’s just occurred to me that the idea of

sending us on this trip probably originated with Mom. Think of the vacation she's having! It must save her at least two hours of cooking a day, having you out of the house."

"Mom likes to take care of people," Sandy told him indignantly.

Ken sobered briefly. "No one knows that better than I do," he murmured, half to himself. Sandy's words had reminded him of that fearful night in the past when he had stumbled by chance into the office of the *Brentwood Advance*, the weekly newspaper owned and operated by the redheaded Allen clan. Ken's father, the famous foreign correspondent Richard Holt, had been in deadly danger. And Ken, alone and helpless, had been desperately in need of friends. Pop Allen and his two sons, Bert and Sandy, had proved to be those friends.

After that adventure was over, and Richard Holt was safe again, tiny Mom Allen had insisted that Ken, motherless for years, make his home with her family. Both the Holts had accepted the offer with amazed gratitude. Now, whenever Richard Holt was not busy on an assignment for his news-service employers, Global News, he spent his free time in Brentwood. From the beginning he had encouraged Pop Allen to keep Ken busy on the *Brentwood Advance*, and Pop, taking him at his word, gave assignments to Ken as often as he gave them to his own younger son, Sandy, who was almost exactly Ken's age. Many of the adventures the boys had shared, including the most recent one, *The Mystery of the Vanishing Magician*, had grown out of routine jobs which Pop Allen had assigned to them. Often, those adventures had produced stories which even mammoth Global News had accepted for distribution all over the country—stories written by Ken and illustrated with Sandy's photographs.

Both Pop Allen and Richard Holt were proud when Granger, the gruff New York manager of Global, described the boys as "having the makings of real newspapermen." But they both shook their heads over the public attention the boys sometimes attracted, as a result of the dangerous experiences they had survived.

"I think it's about time for that trip to Europe I've always promised them," Richard Holt had said, during the furor that followed *The Mystery of the Vanishing Magician*. "I've got to fly over myself next month, for that conference at The Hague. They could meet me there when it's over. They could travel on one of those cargo freighters that carry a few passengers. Those ships are quiet and peaceful—and the boys will enjoy talking to the crew, which they wouldn't get much chance to do on a regular passenger liner."

Pop Allen had nodded. "Good idea. Nice slow voyage on a freighter should calm them down and give all of us a little peace and quiet."

Ken's thoughts were jerked back to the snug cabin on the *Helen*

Rogers by Sandy's voice. "Well?" Sandy was demanding. "Are you coming along to the pantry or aren't you?"

"No one can prevent you from making a pig of yourself," Ken retorted. "But stop trying to force me to behave like one too."

"Hah! Fat chance anybody has of making you do anything you don't want to do. Stubborn is the word for you-just plain stubborn."

"Your difficulty," Ken said, "is that you can't distinguish between stubbornness and strength of character. Now take the case-"

Sandy cut him off. "No, thanks. At least I can tell the difference between sensible conversation and one of your efforts to stall me. If you think you can keep me here talking until it's too late for me to make a sandwich-"

"O.K.," Ken conceded defeat. "Let's go."

The door of their stateroom opened directly into the combination lounge and dining room where the ship's officers and her handful of passengers ate their meals. A long, leather-covered bench ran beneath the row of portholes overlooking the forward cargo hatches. Half a dozen tables, firmly bolted to the floor, stood in front of the bench, and a pair of chairs on the opposite side of each table enabled the room to accommodate two dozen diners-several more than the *Helen Rogers* was carrying on this trip. The tables not used for meals held stacks of magazines already well read, and the boys' small portable chessboard.

Just aft of the dining room was the pantry, and Sandy headed directly for it. But he hadn't reached the entrance when the door of stateroom No. 2, next to the one labeled No. 1, which the boys occupied, swung open, and the fluttery voice of Mrs. Anderson stopped him in his tracks. Her plump middle-aged figure was as usual teetering on the high heels which she insisted upon wearing, to the concern of every man of the crew.

"Sandy," Mrs. Anderson begged, clutching at the redhead's arm to steady herself, "would you *please* show me how to load my camera?"

Sandy looked up at the clock, above the long sideboard built against the dining-room's interior wall. "Right now, Mrs. Anderson?" he asked, avoiding Ken's grinning glance. "Wouldn't after supper-?"

"Oh, no, right now if you please, Sandy. I want to be ready to catch the sunset if we have a nice one."

"All right, ma'am." Sandy sighed. "You remember when I showed you before"-he was proud of himself for not mentioning the number of times he had already given the same demonstration-"I explained that you slide this catch back, first, to-"

"I tell you what, Sandy!" Mrs. Anderson interrupted swiftly. "Why don't you just load it yourself? Wouldn't that be easier than explaining it to me again? I know I'll never learn to do it."

“Why, sure!” Ken said from behind Mrs. Anderson’s back. “Sandy’d love to load it for you. Wouldn’t you, Sandy? He has nothing else to do right now.”

Before Sandy could answer either of them, Mr. Anderson’s deep voice, with a hint of laughter in it, spoke from his stateroom door. “Might as well do it, Sandy,” he said. “Mamma’s fixed her automatic washer with a hairpin and I’ve always suspected that she knows more about the farm equipment I sell than I do myself. She could certainly load a camera if she put her mind to it, but she won’t as long as she can get somebody to do it for her.”

“Now, George, you’ll have these boys thinking. I’m lazy,” his wife protested.

“You’re not lazy,” Mr. Anderson assured her. “You’re just a born executive, with an absolutely uncanny ability to get other people to do things for you. It’s a real gift, that is. Go ahead, my boy,” he added to Sandy, “as a favor to me. Because if you don’t do it, I’ll have to, and it’s a job I hate. Besides, you owe me a favor after the way you trimmed me at chess last night.”

He sat down at one of the magazine-littered tables—Angelo was readying the four at the far end of the room for supper—and took a book out of his pocket.

Sandy, with a wry grin, had already begun to insert the roll of film into Mrs. Anderson’s camera.

“Isn’t he dreadful?” Mrs. Anderson demanded, with an affectionate glance at her husband. “The way he talks! Oh, good evening, Mr. Gerard!” She turned suddenly to smile brightly at the ship’s fifth passenger, whose tall, gray-haired figure appeared just then from his stateroom on the far side of the dining room.

“Good evening,” Gerard answered courteously, sliding into the place he always occupied at mealtime, at the table adjoining the captain’s.

Ken and Sandy had whiled away some of the long hours of the trip speculating idly about Gerard’s profession. His slow, deliberate voice suggested that he might be a teacher or a professor; so did his heavy briar pipe, his horn-rimmed glasses; so, too, did the well-cut brown or gray tweeds he always wore, even when Mr. Anderson and the boys settled for sports shirts and slacks, as more in keeping with the casual khakis of the ship’s officers. But if Gerard was a teacher of any kind, he had chosen not to mention it. In fact, he had said remarkably little about himself during the whole voyage—completely unlike the friendly Andersons, who had already told the boys so much about themselves and their family at home.

Sandy finished his chore, and was handing the loaded camera back to its owner, just as Angelo rang the supper bell.

“Too bad, Sandy,” Ken said with mock sympathy, moving up to walk beside his friend toward the table they shared with Gerard and the first engineer. “Do you think you’ll survive on nothing but a triple-thick steak, potatoes, asparagus, salad, dessert, and coffee-just this once?”

“I’ll manage,” Sandy muttered. “But I’m warning you! Don’t start any of your delaying tactics when I suggest a little snack later on tonight.” He slid behind the table and lurched against Mr. Gerard as a sudden sway of the ship threw him sideways along the bench. “Sorry,” he said.

“Quite all right.” Gerard had a steadying hand on his elbow. “No damage done-or does that disappoint you?” He smiled at their puzzlement. “I was just thinking you two must be sort of hankering for some trouble by now. This must seem a pretty dull voyage to a couple of young men like yourselves, used to playing detective.”

Ken could feel himself stiffen at the phrase that he and Sandy hated above all others. But he couldn’t blame Mr. Gerard. It was Mrs. Anderson, who remembered reading about one of their adventures, and who had eagerly told everyone within earshot about “those two famous young newsmen and detectives,” as she called the boys.

“I hope you’re not accepting Mrs. Anderson’s version of us,” Ken remarked. “I’m afraid that it’s a good deal exaggerated.” Then he grabbed for his salad plate to keep it from sliding across the table, and managed to change the subject by addressing the new arrival at their table, First Engineer Ben Sloan. “Can’t you steady this ship down a little during mealtimes, Mr. Sloan?”

“Steady her?” The officer looked amused. “Why, she’s steady as a rock right now. If you knew anything about the sea, you’d know this was a smooth day, comparatively speaking.” Sloan grinned. “And we’ve got a nice little breeze right on our tail, so we ought to have picked up a couple of knots.”

They all nodded then to quiet, round-faced little Captain Chisholm, taking his place at the adjoining table along with the Andersons. Soon that trio would be joined by Chief Officer Steve Torkling, now relieving the second mate, who had the four-to-eight bridge watch.

Gerard returned to the first engineer’s comment almost immediately. “Will that tail wind change our arrival hour in Valencia?”

“Might,” Sloan said. “But a navigation officer would know better than an engineer. I just keep the propeller going around.”

“Any navigation officer knows more about anything than you engineers do.” The speaker was Second Mate Gus Green, hastily pulling out his chair at the third table, and winking at the boys as he spoke. “What’s the problem?”

Sloan repeated Gerard's question for him.

Green nodded. "Yes, we're making good speed now. We'll be in the Strait of Gibraltar in a couple of hours. And instead of docking late tomorrow night, we may make Valencia earlier in the evening -about seven, maybe, if we keep a tail wind." He ate as he talked, in a hurry to get back to his watch. But he added politely, "Hope you don't object to having the trip shortened, sir?"

Gerard smiled. "I was just curious. I'm on vacation, so it makes no difference to me when we get in."

Angelo leaned over the table at that moment, sure-footedly fighting the ship's motion as he deftly slid one plate in front of Gerard and another in front of Sandy. "That one's yours, special," he murmured to Sandy as he turned away toward the pantry for the other two plates.

Admiringly Sandy eyed the two-inch-thick slice of sirloin. "Well," he murmured, "this'll do for a start, anyway!"

Before Ken could think of a squelching rejoinder, a hand bearing a folded sheet of yellow paper thrust itself in front of him. "Just came in for you," a voice said quietly in his ear.

Ken didn't have to look up to know that the voice belonged to Mike Ingham, the ship's radio operator. Youngest member of the crew, Ingham already was a well-established friend to the two boys.

"Thanks, Mike." While Ingham slipped away to his own place, at Green's table, Ken unfolded the sheet of paper.

Sandy, a forkful of steak halfway to his mouth, looked across the table to ask anxiously, "From Brentwood? Anything wrong?"

"From Global," Ken told him. "Granger."

"Oh. Nothing about your father, is it?"

"No." Ken was already refolding the sheet and shoving it into his pocket. "Just a little business Granger may want us to do." He leaned to one side to allow Angelo to put down his plate. "Sure looks good!" he said, picking up his knife and fork.

Sandy still had not swallowed the piece of steak on his fork. "What kind of business?" he wanted to know.

"It'll keep," Ken assured him. "You certainly don't want to talk business with that in front of you, do you?"

"A little excitement?" Mr. Gerard asked pleasantly. "Something to break the monotony of your trip?"

"Is it something he wants us to send him from shipboard, Ken?"

"No, nothing exciting at all," Ken didn't answer Sandy's question, but slid his foot cautiously along the floor under the table to step sharply on Sandy's toe. "Say! This steak is really terrific, isn't it?"

That time Sandy got his urgent message and joined enthusiastically in praise of the sirloin and the cook who had prepared it. But Gerard,

after a mouthful or two, seemed suddenly unable to finish his meal. He got to his feet, murmuring unintelligibly about the roughness of the weather, and moved quickly down the corridor toward the narrow balcony like space overlooking the aft hatches.

As usual, no one made any reference to a passenger's sudden departure from the table. The boys greeted Mr. Torkling, arriving for his supper after finishing his relief stint for Second Mate Green, now back on duty. After that, the conversation at their table consisted largely of a monologue on Valencia by Ben Sloan, who knew the port well.

But as soon as Sloan departed to resume his duties, leaving the boys alone, Sandy said quietly, "O.K. Let me see that mysterious message." Ken handed it to him and Sandy's eyes raced through the few lines Mike Ingham had typed out, under the heading *To: Holt, S. S. Helen Rogers:*

EMBEZZLEMENT NEWSBREAK PENDING. VERIFY PRESENCE
ARTHUR GERARD SHIPBOARD IMMEDIATELY. STAND BY
INSTRUCTIONS INTERVIEW
GRANGER GLOBAL NEWS

Sandy whistled softly and handed the paper back. Neither of the boys mentioned it again until they had rather hastily finished their meal and returned to their stateroom.

"No wonder you were trying to shut me up," Sandy said. "Wow! Think Gerard suspected it was about him?" he added.

"Probably," Ken said bleakly, "considering my none-too-subtle efforts to cover up. But I didn't dare risk handing it to you, for fear he could read it when you did. And I was so bowled over, all I could think of was trying to change the subject as fast as possible. Of course," he added, "we're assuming Granger means Gerard himself is suspected of embezzlement-in which case he'd naturally be suspicious of any cables received on board, especially by a couple of reporters. But maybe Gerard doesn't have anything directly to do with the case Granger is talking about."

"That's so," Sandy agreed slowly, after a moment. "I hadn't thought of that. Maybe Gerard is just an expert accountant, or a banker-somebody the police would want help from, for some reason, in connection with an embezzlement. Or our Arthur Gerard may not even be the one Granger's interested in after all."

Ken nodded. "That's possible too."

"Still, it's funny Gerard never mentions the business he's in," Sandy said, flinging himself on the bunk.

"Odd, maybe, but hardly suspicious in itself," Ken pointed out. "Especially as Mr. Anderson talks everybody's ear off about his farm equipment whenever he gets a chance. Anyway," he concluded,

“there’s no use our trying to figure out the situation now, with so little to go on. Let’s get a radiogram ready to send back to Granger-with Gerard’s description included, in case this is a case of mistaken identity.”

“That should do it,” Sandy said some minutes later, reading through once more the message they had worked out:

ARTHUR GERARD ABOARD. APPROXIMATELY SIX FEET
HUNDRED EIGHTY POUNDS GRAY HAIR BROWN EYES GLASSES.

“Has Mike gone back to his office yet?” Ken asked.

Sandy opened the door a crack, looked out at the deserted dining room, and nodded. A moment later the boys were climbing the steep inside stairway to the upper deck. At the top of the flight they walked rearward and pushed open the door that led onto the wind-swept boat deck. The big white shape on their right, slung high on davits, was one of the ship’s two power lifeboats, capable of holding over fifty people. The slits of light to their left indicated the louvered door to Mike Ingham’s radio shack. The sky overhead was clear, scattered with brilliantly sharp stars and a silver half-moon. The contrast between the clear sky and the heavy sullen water racing past the ship in heaving swells was somehow ominous.

Ken rapped on Mike’s door, breaking into the low pattern of ditdahs sounding from the radioman’s receiver. And then, at Mike’s quick “Come in,” they pushed the door open and entered the small, equipment-crowded room.

Ken handed over the message. “We’d like to send this, Mike.”

“Sure.” Mike read the message aloud in a voice schooled to show no sign of human curiosity. “Right,” he said. “I’ll get it off immediately.” Then he swiveled away from his desk, turning around to face the boys. “Were you up here while I was finishing my supper?” he asked abruptly.

“No.” Ken shook his head. “We went to our stateroom and stayed there until just now. Why? Do you think somebody was in here while you were out?”

“I’m pretty sure of it,” Mike said slowly, his angular young face set in lines of concern. “I’m usually careful about locking my door, but I suppose I might have slipped up once. I must have, because I think somebody went through my file of incoming messages.”

“What makes you think so?” Sandy wanted to know.

“Because when I got back here now, yours-the message I gave you at the table-was on top, and I always file them in order.”

“But isn’t that where ours would have been-on top?” Ken asked.

“No. Because another message came in after yours, and was filed above it. But when I got back here a couple of minutes ago, it was yours that was on top.” Mike shook his head. “I don’t like it. I could

be fired for letting anybody read the private messages that go through this office.”

“Mike,” Ken said slowly, “you know what was in that message you gave me, don’t you?”

Mike looked slightly uncomfortable. “Of course. But don’t ask me to discuss it with you.”

“I wasn’t going to,” Ken assured him. “I just meant that it might give you an idea of who might have been in here, trying to get a look at that radiogram. I wasn’t very bright when you gave me the message. I think he may have suspected that it was about him.”

“I don’t suppose,” Sandy said slowly, “that the message that came in after ours was addressed to that gentleman, or referred to him in some way?”

“You can suppose whatever you like,” Ingham said. “But you won’t find out from me.” He swung back to his desk. “Sorry I brought up the question. I had no right to ask you about it, especially since I can’t answer your questions.”

“Certainly you had a right,” Ken told him. “This room is your responsibility. Naturally you’re concerned if you think somebody came in here uninvited.”

“Well, perhaps I imagined it,” Mike said. “Anyway, I’ll get right at your radiogram.” His hand moved toward his instruments and the boys accepted the gesture as their dismissal.

When they stepped out on the boat deck again, and shut Mike’s door behind themselves, they glanced instinctively forward toward the bridge, nerve center of the ship, where a helmsman was always on duty under the supervision of the officer of the watch. The glass-fronted space was completely dark now, but the boys knew it wasn’t empty-and knew better than to enter it without invitation.

Sandy pulled Ken toward the narrow stairs leading to the next level, the flying bridge. Seldom used for navigation, it made a pleasant place for passengers to sit on a calm, sunny day. “Let’s go up for a minute and take a look at the stars,” he said.

Together, they started for the stairs. But they had taken only a few steps when feet thudded noisily across the flying bridge overhead and a terrifying cry rang out into the night.

“Man overboard!”

CHAPTER II

MAN OVERBOARD!

Instinctively the boys rushed to the closest rail, reaching it at a point about midway along the portside of the boat deck.

"Man overboard!" The cry came again, directly above them this time.

Their eyes strained down toward the racing water, toward blackness broken by patches of light from the portholes of the crews' quarters.

"Look!" Sandy grabbed at Ken with one hand and pointed with the other. For an instant, lifted up by the ship's wake, and almost silhouetted against the white froth of the churning water, a dark figure slipped swiftly astern. In a fragment of a second it was lost from sight.

"Down here!" Sandy bellowed. "Down here! Astern on the portside!"

The door of the radio shack behind them had already opened, and slammed back violently against the bulkhead. In the rectangle of light it cast into the night, the boys saw a white life ring arcing outward from the flying bridge above them, and falling into the water below. A moment later, just as the ship resounded with the clanging ring of alarm bells, the flare attached to the life ring burst into brilliant white light.

Within seconds the flare was far astern, visible one instant as a hot flame atop a wave, and the next only as a reflected glare from the depths of a deep trough between two crests.

Mike Ingham was beside them at the rail. "Did you see him?"

"Only for a second," Sandy gasped. "Right alongside the ship."

"Could you tell who it was?" The question hung for an instant in the tense air. Ken had been about to ask Sandy the same thing. So far as he himself was concerned, the figure, so briefly glimpsed, might have belonged to anyone.

"No," Sandy said. "He must have been face down. His clothes were dark-I think. But that's all I could tell."

The deck beneath their feet began to shudder under the powerful thrust of the reversed propeller. Dozens of feet clumped on metal ladders as the emergency lifeboat crew, each man wearing a bright-orange life jacket, swarmed onto the boat deck in response to the jangling alarm.

"Stand by the lifeboat!" Gus Green, the second mate, still tying the tapes of his own life preserver, then gave swift orders to uncover the

boat, so that it would be ready to launch the moment it could serve any purpose-the moment there was any sign of the figure that had gone into the water only seconds before.

The *Helen Rogers* was losing her forward motion rapidly now, still shuddering convulsively. Bells clanged in the engine room far below. Slowly the shuddering decreased. Then, through the ventilating shaft that came up from the engine room, the boys could hear the whine of the main turbine. The ship began to cut sharply to port in a tight curve. In less time than they would have believed possible, considering the size of the ship, her bow was pointing back toward the bobbing flare now perhaps a quarter of a mile away.

The entire ship had come aglow with lights in the past half minute. Clusters of floodlights atop the masts washed the decks with their glare. From the flying bridge two powerful searchlights were crisscrossing the dark water in wide, slow sweeps. A third searchlight from the bridge pinpointed the life ring and its flaming flare, outlining the tiny object whenever it appeared on the crest of a wave.

Captain Chisholm was out on the port wing of the bridge, the searchlight behind him making a halo of his fluff of gray hair, and glinting off the bright metalwork of the binoculars he held to his eyes. Chief Officer Torkling, who had assumed command on the bridge, hurried aft to speak briefly to the captain, and then loped toward the radio shack. Mike Ingham, seeing his approach, left the boys at the rail and met the officer at the door to his room.

Torkling thrust a piece of paper into Mike's hand. "Our position. Get it off at once to all ships in the vicinity. Send a general alarm to watch sharp for a man in the water."

The *Helen Rogers* was slowly edging up on the still-blazing flare. When the ship was within five hundred feet of the white circle of cork, Captain Chisholm gave an order. The ship swung to starboard and began a wide circle around the flare, and as she moved through the heaving swells, the searchlights kept up their endless crisscrossing pattern.

"How much chance do you suppose-?" Sandy broke off as the chief steward tapped him on the shoulder.

"Go downstairs to the lounge, please. We'll have to ask all passengers to remain there."

Ken and Sandy nodded silently and made their way below.

The Andersons were already in the lounge when the boys reached it. For once, Mrs. Anderson was not chattering. She sat huddled against her husband, on the leather-covered bench that ran beneath the forward bulkhead portholes. He had his arm around her and she was trembling.

"Mother," Mr. Anderson said gruffly, the moment the boys entered

the room, "here's Ken and Sandy now. They're both all right!"

"Oh, thank goodness!" Mrs. Anderson looked up at them with wet eyes. "I was so afraid! We didn't know anything-and they wouldn't let us go up on deck." She dabbed at her eyes with a crumpled handkerchief. "Then-" her voice shook- "then who was it?"

"We don't know, ma'am," Sandy told her quietly. "I don't think anybody knows yet. I suppose they'll check the whole ship as soon as they can."

After that, for a long moment, there didn't seem anything to say. Ken and Sandy couldn't blot out of their minds the grim blackness of the water, couldn't stop wondering whether the man in that violent wilderness of sea had managed to reach the life ring-would be able to cling to it until the lifeboat could rescue him.

"Where did he fall from?" Anderson asked abruptly. "Or don't you know?"

"From the flying bridge, so far as we could tell," Ken told him. "We must have been right below him at the time. We were on the boat deck. But we didn't actually see him fall."

Mrs. Anderson shivered. "How horrible! To know you'd lost your balance-to feel yourself toppling over into that-that nightmare of black water! I've always been afraid to stand by the rail at night. Now I never can again-never! Do you think they'll find him?"

"There's no use me trying to guess about it, Mother," her husband told her. "I know nothing about ships. I'm not even sure what they're doing up there." His head jerked toward the boat deck.

"They threw a life ring down," Ken explained, "less than a minute after he fell-less than half a minute, probably. A life ring with a flare on it," he added. "The ship's circling around that flare, and all the searchlights are on it."

The *Helen Rogers* was rolling more heavily than ever now, as she turned her broadside to the wind and swells. One of the chairs slid slowly away from its place at the captain's table, to smack with a dull thud against the bulkhead. Angelo appeared out of the pantry like a white-jacketed ghost. His tanned face was gray. He didn't look at any of the four people in the lounge. Automatically, as if he were scarcely aware of what he was doing, he moved the chair back to its proper position and then vanished into his pantry again.

Suddenly the chief steward, a sturdy, square-faced man, appeared at the door of the room. He looked sharply around. "Mr. Gerard? Has anyone seen him?"

"Gerard?" Anderson echoed blankly. "Why, no-not since supertime."

"That's right. I remember he left the table early." Mrs. Anderson was sitting up straight. "Was he-is he the one?"

"We don't know. We are checking, Mrs. Anderson." He turned to the boys. "Have you seen Mr. Gerard?"

"Not since he left our table at suppertime," Ken told him.

"I see." The steward nodded, hesitated a moment, and then walked briskly to the cabin door numbered four-the room opposite the boys' cabin, the room Gerard had been occupying. His knuckles rapped quickly against it-once, twice, three times. No voice responded to his knock, and there was no sound of movement behind the door.

The steward glanced back over his shoulder, as if about to ask the boys and the Andersons to leave. But he didn't speak. Instead, he took a jingling key ring from his pocket and unlocked the door. An instant later he had stepped inside the cabin and shut the door.

Four pairs of eyes remained fastened on the gray rectangle for perhaps thirty seconds. At the end of that time the door reopened and the steward appeared again, poker-faced. Efficiently he relocked the door.

Then, in quick succession, he unlocked and inspected the three cabins which had been unoccupied since the ship left New York-the rooms numbered three, five, and six. When he closed the door of the last one he spoke to the four passengers in the lounge for the first time in several minutes.

"Will you check your cabins, please?"

"But why would Mr. Gerard be in our cabin-or in the boys?" Mrs. Anderson asked.

"Hush, Mother," Mr. Anderson told her quietly, getting to his feet. "Don't ask questions." He pushed open his own unlocked door and gestured for the steward to enter. A moment later the steward had also glanced quickly around the boys' stateroom, into their closet and bathroom, even behind the drawn curtain of the shower cubicle.

"Thank you," he said stiffly. "The captain will make a statement to you as soon as any news is available." He disappeared as suddenly as he had come.

Half an hour crawled slowly by, marked only by the occasional sound of doors opening and closing. It was obvious that the whole ship was being searched. Her slow roll marked off the seconds like a ponderous pendulum swinging in space.

"The captain wants to see you." The steward's voice startled all of them. They had not heard his noiseless approach down the corridor. He was looking unmistakably at Ken and Sandy, and when they stood up, grabbing at the nearest support to balance themselves, he added, "You'll find him on the boat deck." He was out of sight again before they reached the companionway leading to the upper level.

In the harsh glare of the floodlights, the captain and three or four crew members formed a small tight group near the rail at the spot

where the boys had looked down at that disappearing figure. From behind Mike Ingham, standing in the doorway of his shack, came the incessant whimpering of the loud-speaker of his receiver.

Captain Chisholm saw Ken and Sandy and beckoned to them. He was a short man whose cheerful plump face normally showed little trace of his thirty long years at sea. But tonight the round cheeks looked drawn, and there was a cold hardness in the eyes behind his spray-spattered steel-rimmed spectacles. As usual, however, he seemed oblivious of the chilly night air, despite the lightness of the khaki trousers and shirt that were his only protection against the weather.

He looked first at Sandy. "Sparks tells me you saw the man go over."

"Not quite, sir. I don't remember what I said to Mike-to Mr. Ingham. But all I really saw was a glimpse of a figure in the water, right alongside the ship-sliding back in the wake."

"You're certain you saw the figure at all? It's dark down there."

Sandy nodded. "He was on a crest of foam and I could see him quite plainly."

"Close to the ship, you say?" The captain pressed the point. "How close?"

Sandy thought a moment. "It's hard to tell, sir, but I'd guess he wasn't more than ten feet from the hull." He turned to Ken. "You saw him too, didn't you?"

Ken nodded. "Just for a split second. I didn't see a face, or anything recognizable, any more than Sandy did. But I think Sandy's right about the distance from the hull. It certainly wasn't more than ten feet, probably a little less than that."

Captain Chisholm turned to his chief officer. "That's what I was afraid of," he said quietly. "But we'll continue the search."

Ken opened his mouth to ask a question, but the captain had turned back to the rail. Suddenly Ken knew he didn't need to ask. He realized that a body only ten feet from the hull might very easily be sucked under by the twenty-foot propeller, and drawn inevitably within reach of its death-dealing bronze blades. Ken tried to make his mind a blank, to blot out the terrifying picture that suddenly filled it.

Around and around went the *Helen Rogers* in a slow, wide circle. The flare on the Me ring burned out, but still the ship pursued its monotonous course, her lights swinging back and forth with tireless regularity. Overhead, thin clouds raced across the moon, sped on their way by a brisk wind. And the moon too moved across the sky as the hours went past.

Crewmen came and went quietly. Orders were given and obeyed. Two messmen unobtrusively brought up platters of sandwiches and mugs of steaming coffee, and the men drank and ate, but without ever

taking their eyes from the heaving water below.

Ken and Sandy, standing back out of the way in a corner near the radio shack, were not sent below as they continually expected to be. Once Mike Ingham paused briefly beside them, on his way back from reporting to the captain, and Sandy asked him, "How long will they keep up the search?"

"It's up to the Old Man," Mike answered. "I never saw a man lost overboard before-it just doesn't happen very often-so I can't say exactly how it's handled. But I've got a hunch we'll be here until daylight, so that we can get a last good look around."

The steward came through the heavy door that led to the interior of the ship and walked quickly to the captain's side. The low voice in which he spoke carried easily across the quiet deck. "Every man accounted for except Mr. Gerard."

"You've searched the entire ship?"

"Everything but the cargo holds, Captain."

Captain Chisholm's shoulders lifted and sagged in a long sigh, and then he turned back to his vigil over the rail. "Thank you, Steward," he said quietly.

Midnight came. There was more coffee and more sandwiches. Some of the men standing by the lifeboat went below to take their watch on duty. Others, released from duty below, came to take their places. And still the *Helen Rogers* moved in her clockwise course.

"Green." The captain spoke without turning from the rail. "You sounded the alarm." It was a statement, not a question.

"Yes, sir."

"Tell it from the beginning, Green."

Still wearing his life preserver, the second mate joined his superior. "I was on duty, as you know, sir. When I heard a funny noise on the flying bridge, I assumed the awning had come loose up there, and I went up to investigate. I was right. One of the lashings had snapped. I made it fast and started below again. The moon was fairly bright. I wasn't using a flashlight. I'd just rounded the stack, heading for the port ladder to the boat deck, when I saw this dim figure at the rail. The shadow of the stack fell right across it-I couldn't see who it was. But no member of the crew had any business up there at that hour, so I assumed it was a passenger."

"That was your only reason for thinking so? You didn't actually recognize the man?" Captain Chisholm let the binoculars hang from their strap and rubbed his eyes.

"No, I didn't, Captain. That was the only reason. And I thought it was a little rough for a passenger to be alone up there-she was pitching pretty heavily right about suppertime, you remember. So I started across the deck toward him, to suggest that he go below. But

almost as soon as I turned, he seemed to lean out over the rail and—well, that’s when it happened. He just kind of somersaulted over, I guess. I saw his legs in the air for a second. I’d started running toward him, then I realized it was too late, so I turned and headed for the life ring instead—the one on the portside of the flying bridge. I threw it over, and yelled—I guess I yelled out the moment I saw him go. And then I ran to sound the alarm.”

The captain waited a moment before he spoke. “You say ‘he seemed to lean out over the rail,’” he repeated precisely. “Could you be more specific about that? What came into your mind? What did you think he was doing?”

“I’m not sure I had time to think, Captain,” Green answered carefully. “I suppose if anything came into my mind at all it was the idea that he was sick—that he’d leaned over instinctively when he realized it. But it happened so quickly—”

“Yes. I understand. And Gerard did leave the supper table early. I suppose you’d noticed that too, as I had. So you would naturally think—” The captain didn’t finish the thought. “Then, you said, he ‘somersaulted over.’”

“Yes, sir. I can’t think of any other way to put it.” Green, a lean, spare man of early middle age, rubbed his ear reflectively as he spoke. “He just—well, he just went over.”

“I see.” The captain put the binoculars up to his eyes again and was once more peering down at the water. “Why the flying bridge, I wonder?” he said, as if to himself. “If he simply felt the need of air, why go up that high?”

Green didn’t answer. The captain obviously expected no reply.

“Very well, Green,” the captain said quietly.

“Thank you. You’ll have to put that statement in writing for me tomorrow, of course.”

“Yes, sir.”

The hours crawled slowly after that. Only the captain and his chief officer remained constantly at their posts. The other men on emergency duty there on the deck changed places when the watch changed, but the lifeboat constantly had a crew standing by.

At five o’clock Ken and Sandy went below, to change their spray-soaked clothing and swallow a quick cup of black coffee in the pantry, where the urn for the officers’ mess had been kept hot and filled all night. They were back on the boat deck in less than half an hour, in time to see the dawn roll in from the east.

Slowly at first, and then with a rush, the new day came. The black water became lead-colored, faded to a silvery gray, and finally began to glow a deep blue, laced by the red-tinged foam that caught the rays of the young sun.

Once more the *Helen Rogers* steamed a full, slow circle. No sign of life showed on either side of the ship, except for half a dozen gulls skimming and soaring over the ruffled wake.

Captain Chisholm looked at his chief officer. His own round face, and the square, ruddy face of Steve Torkling, were stiff with weariness and with the tiny crystals of salt that the spray had flung against them during their night-long vigil.

"We will resume course," Captain Chisholm said. The chief officer nodded to him as the small, round man started forward to the bridge.

The captain halted as he passed the boys. "I'd like to speak to you in more detail about what you saw earlier tonight. Will you please be in my quarters in an hour?" He glanced at his watch. "Let's make it seven o'clock."

"Yes, sir," Ken and Sandy said simultaneously.

Captain Chisholm then poked his head inside the radio shack. "Sparks, you'd better get down to my quarters at six thirty. I'll have something ready by then for you to send to the home office."

Ken and Sandy were outside the captain's door on the dot. They had filled in the time haphazardly, fruitlessly, drinking coffee that they didn't really want, discussing the wording of another radiogram to Granger in New York, and deciding to let it go until they had finished their talk with the captain.

Captain Chisholm had shaved and changed his clothes in the interval since they had seen him on deck. Some of the strain had been erased from his face.

"Close the door and sit down, please," he said on a welcoming note when the boys presented themselves. "That's it," he nodded, when they had taken places on the comfortable leather-covered bench that ran from his broad desk to the forward bulkhead.

Then he turned his swivel chair around to face them directly. "I'm not going to ask you to repeat what you told me earlier," he said, "though you'll have to get it all down on paper for me sometime today, if you will." He smiled briefly. "That's not putting too great a burden on a couple of reporters, I guess."

"No, sir," Ken agreed. "We'll be glad to do that. And it shouldn't take us long. After all, we didn't see much."

"But I am going to ask you something else," Captain Chisholm said. "You see, I know a little about you two." A twinkle lighted his tired eyes briefly. "And not simply from listening to Mrs. Anderson either. A man at the home office, who is a great admirer of Richard Holt, and who has seen your stuff in *Global News*, briefed me about you before I came aboard this trip. So, in view of your background, I'm going to talk rather more confidentially to you than a captain usually does to his passengers. First, I want to ask you a question. Do you have any

information that might throw further light on this very unhappy business?"

Ken glanced at Sandy and the redhead nodded in answer to his unspoken question. "Well, sir," Ken said slowly, "I think we'd better show you this." He pulled from his pocket the radio message they had received from the Global News office.

Chisholm took it from his outthrust hand and read it rapidly. "Thank you," he said. "I hadn't seen that before, of course. But it doesn't surprise me." Then he picked up a similar sheet of paper from his desk and handed it to them.

The boys read it simultaneously. It was addressed to Captain Evan Chisholm, S. S. *Helen Rogers*, and it said:

WARRANT ISSUED FOR ARREST OF PASSENGER ARTHUR GERARD. AMERICAN CONSUL AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES WILL BOARD VESSEL BEFORE DOCKING VALENCIA TO TAKE CHARGE.

HILTON ADAM LINES

"So you knew about it too," Ken said, on a note of relief, handing the message back to the captain.

"I understand my message arrived a few minutes after yours did," Chisholm said, "but I received mine first because Sparks dropped it off here before he went below."

"Then yours was the one filed on top of-" Sandy stopped short. Without knowing whether Mike Ingham had told the captain about the misplaced file copies, he felt uncertain as to his own right to repeat Mike's confidence.

"Yes." The captain nodded. "I know about that. Sparks told me that he found his file disturbed. He also felt it was his duty-as indeed it was, under the circumstances-to mention your suggestion that Gerard might have entered his office and accidentally shifted the order of the messages after reading them."

"I probably shouldn't have made that suggestion openly, sir," Ken said, feeling uncomfortable. "But it was the only possibility that seemed to make any sense. If Gerard really was guilty of embezzlement, he might very well have been worried about the law catching up with him. So he might have risked snooping in the radio shack in order to see if our message had anything to do with him. And there didn't seem to be any reason for anybody else on board to have been curious about a radiogram addressed to us."

"Of course we didn't know then that you'd had a message too," Sandy put in.

"No one knew about my message except Sparks himself," the captain pointed out. "So it must have been yours which aroused somebody's curiosity. And I must say, for want of a better theory, that I agree with yours-it was Gerard who disturbed Sparks' file in an effort

to read the message you had received.

“And that brings us,” Chisholm went on quietly, “to the next problem. In your opinion, does this theory cast a new light on what appears to have been an accidental death?”

Ken was quite sure what the captain meant. But he kept his voice noncommittal as he asked. “What kind of a light, sir?”

“You’ve been up there on the flying bridge,” the captain replied, avoiding a direct answer. “You know how high that rail is.”

“Sure,” Sandy said readily. “It reaches a couple of inches above the level of my waistline.”

“Exactly.” The captain’s round head nodded soberly. “And Gerard was at least an inch or two shorter than you are. So does it really seem likely to you that he *accidentally* fell over that rail?”

There was a moment of dead silence in the comfortable stateroom, a room as neat and trim as the ship’s captain himself.

“Are you suggesting, sir,” Ken asked slowly, “that someone pushed him over?”

But he knew before he asked the question what the answer had to be.

“Oh, no. Not at all. My second mate was up there at the time, and he would certainly have known if there had been a third party on the flying bridge just then. No,” the captain said again, “I’m suggesting that Gerard saw the copies of the radio messages we received, knew that he was going to be arrested when we reached Valencia, and simply couldn’t face it.”

“You’re suggesting suicide,” Ken said.

“That’s right.” Captain Chisholm sounded reluctant to use the word. “I’m suggesting suicide!”

CHAPTER III

KEN LAUNCHES A THEORY

Sandy shut the door of their cabin, dropped into a chair, and let himself slump down into his favorite thinking position. "It could be," he said slowly. "Suicide makes more sense than an accidental death."

"You mean," Ken suggested, "that an accidental death would be stretching the long arm of coincidence too far?"

"Well, wouldn't it?" Sandy demanded. "After all, very few people are lost at sea by falling over a rail. And if a man does happen to go over accidentally, wouldn't it be a whopping coincidence if he also happens to be somebody wanted by the police? Isn't it more sensible to believe that he deliberately took that way out, rather than face arrest and trial?"

Ken looked dubious. He hadn't been surprised when the captain suggested that Gerard had committed suicide. The captain's reasoning—no doubt identical to Sandy's now—had seemed perfectly logical at first. But the more Ken thought about it, the more he was uncertain. "Look," he said, "the worst Gerard could have expected was a prison sentence, probably under ten years and maybe almost half of that off for good behavior. Would that be enough to drive him to suicide?"

Sandy looked up at him, frowning. "Not for most people, I suppose," he admitted after a moment. "But who knows how Gerard's mind worked? Maybe he was the sort of person who couldn't face the disgrace. Anyway," he added more briskly, "it's over now. I suppose we'll never know what really happened. And since we'd be hypocrites if we pretended it affected us very much personally—after all, we never got to know Gerard at all—our only real connection with the whole business now is that we've got to send a dispatch to Granger about it. So why don't we get that over with and then catch up on our sleep?"

Ken didn't answer immediately. "Guess you're right," he said at last. "But it won't be easy to write that dispatch. If we mention 'suicide,' without any proof of it, Gerard's relatives could sue for libel. We'll have to fall back on the old phrase 'jumped or fell,' I suppose, and let the reader make up his own mind as to which it was." He pulled a sheet of paper from his pocket and found a pencil.

Having settled down to the job, it didn't take long to put together a terse message which would give Granger the essential facts of the story. Ken checked it carefully when they were done. "Let's give this to Mike right away," he said.

They were at the foot of the companionway when the radioman appeared at the head of the flight. He had an envelope in his hand.

"For you. Just came in," he said.

"Oh. Thanks." Ken reached for it. "We were bringing you one to go, Mike, but I guess we'll hang on to it now until we've read this."

"Sure thing. I'll be up there whenever you're ready."

Back in their cabin they opened the envelope and read what proved to be a new message from Granger:

YOUR GERARD EXECUTOR ATKINS ESTATE. ACCUSED ILLEGAL SALE ESTATE BONDS AND EMBEZZLING HALF-MILLION PROCEEDS. FACTS DISCOVERED BECAUSE ACCUSED OVERLOOKED PAYMENT PERSONAL PROMISSORY NOTE DUE YESTERDAY. IMMEDIATE CHECK REVEALED ALL GERARD ACCOUNTS LIQUIDATED AND UNCOVERED THEFT OTHERWISE PROBABLY UNDETECTED UNTIL REGULAR AUDIT NEXT MONTH. WARRANT ISSUED ARREST VALENCIA AND RETURN HERE. YOUR CAPTAIN INFORMED. RADIO STORY IMMEDIATELY. AIRMAIL FIX VALENCIA.

"Now it's pictures! And he's already ordered an interview! For once," Sandy said, "Granger isn't going to get what he wants. Shall we just send him what we've got ready?"

"Wait a minute, Sandy." Ken began to pace up and down the small stateroom, covering its length in three strides each way.

"Now what?" Sandy hoisted himself resignedly up on his bunk and made himself comfortable. "Call me when inspiration strikes."

"Listen," Ken said, "Gerard must have known that the theft would be discovered at the regular audit next month-even if he didn't anticipate this earlier break. So isn't it logical to assume that he was on his way to some foreign country where he thought he'd be safe by then-some country, say, that wouldn't be likely to extradite him back to the United States to stand trial?"

"I suppose so," Sandy said. "But I call that a mighty small inspiration."

"So," Ken went on, ignoring the latter half of Sandy's comment, "Gerard probably arranged to have the stolen money transferred to a bank-or several banks-abroad, before he sailed. Also, he probably planned to use a false name abroad, which means he would have needed some sort of identification in that name. For this, he probably got hold of a forged passport. Maybe he even bought some travelers' checks under the false name too, so that he'd have some funds readily available in case it took a while to get his money out of the bank-or banks."

"You'd certainly make a fine embezzler," Sandy told him admiringly. "You think of everything." He reached down over the bunk and fished around in one of the drawers beneath it until he found the can of peanuts he kept there as emergency rations.

"Put that away," Ken said. "The breakfast bell will ring in a couple

of minutes.”

“Breakfast?” Sandy sounded pleasantly surprised. “I almost forgot about it. That’s what comes of staying up all night. Are you leading up to something?” he added politely. “Or are you just talking to yourself?”

“What I’m driving at,” Ken said, “is that Gerard must have had all sorts of documents with him. If we could get a look at them we might be able to discover where he’d disposed of the stolen money. And if we can do that,” he concluded, “we’d really have a story for Granger.”

Sandy’s eyes opened wide and he stared at Ken for a long moment. “Right you are,” he said then, decisively, swinging his feet over the edge of the bunk and dropping to the floor. Now that Ken had suggested a course of action he was all set to go to work-the closeness of the breakfast hour was forgotten. “Unless Gerard was carrying all that stuff on him,” he pointed out, “it should still be in his cabin. Which means that if we could persuade Captain Chisholm to let us search that room-“

A knock at the cabin door interrupted him. “Come in,” he called.

The chief steward entered. “We’re in sight of Spain and Morocco,” he said, “and the captain thought you might like to have a look at them from the flying bridge.” His words, his cheerful expression, suggested that the grim event of the previous night had been pushed into the background. One of the ship’s passengers was missing, but her crew would do its best to see that the others forgot that unfortunate fact as soon as possible.

“Thank you. We’ll go right up.” Sandy waited until the man had closed the door. “Well,” he asked Ken, “are we going to ask the captain if we can search Gerard’s room?”

“He’s probably already sealed it-and will keep it sealed until the police come aboard at Valencia.”

“But we can ask, can’t we? After all, this is your ideal”

“I know. Sure, we can ask.”

On the flying bridge, the captain was pointing out the landmarks, which, if the *Helen Rogers* hadn’t been delayed nearly twelve hours, would have become visible the previous evening.

“Up ahead on our starboard-to the right, that is”-he inserted for Mrs. Anderson’s benefit-“are the hills of Morocco. And soon, up ahead there on the left-the portside-you’ll be able to see the famous Rock of Gibraltar. Except for that stone fortress-the whole Rock is really one huge fort-everything you see on your left is Spain. It will all be much clearer soon.”

Mrs. Anderson caught sight of the boys and turned toward them, smiling. The tragedy of the night before had subdued her usual bubbling spirits, but it was apparent that she had made up her mind

not to let the event spoil the rest of her trip. She held up her camera and spoke to Sandy. "Do you think I can get a good picture of it, Sandy? Of Gibraltar, I mean?"

Sandy let his experienced eye sweep over the water. "It's pretty hazy. Have you got a haze filter?"

"A what?" Mrs. Anderson looked baffled.

"I guess not." Sandy managed not to grin. "Then I'd suggest you wait until the haze lifts."

From two decks below sounded the clamor of the breakfast bell. Mr. Anderson took his wife's arm. "Come along," he said. "There's going to be plenty of time for a picture later."

The Andersons climbed gingerly down the ladder to the boat deck and Captain Chisholm waited for the boys to precede him.

"Could we speak to you a minute, Captain?" Ken asked.

"Certainly." The tired line of his mouth curved faintly upward. "I suppose it has something to do with what happened last night?"

The boys nodded.

"You see," Ken explained, "we have to send a story to Global News, and we wondered if it would be possible for us to look around Gerard's room first. We thought there might be something that-well--"

"Something," Chisholm asked dryly, "that would give you a clue as to what he did with the money he's said to have embezzled?"

Sandy grinned. "That would certainly be a help."

"Well," the captain said carefully, "I had expected, by now, to have sealed that room and kept it sealed until the American consul, or some other authorized person, came aboard to take charge of Gerard's effects. But before I got around to it, I received a radiogram from my office instructing me to search the cabin for money or for any clue as to where Gerard might have concealed a considerable sum. And I just haven't had a chance to do that yet. I've left the chief steward to keep an eye on the cabin to make sure nobody else goes into it, and I'm hoping to get at the job right after breakfast. The dining room will be empty and I can enter the cabin without arousing a lot of curiosity and excitement."

"The New York police must have asked your office to send that order," Ken said, almost absent-mindedly. Then he added, "Would it be possible, Captain, for us to be present when you make the search?"

Captain Chisholm looked at them briefly. "I think so," he said, as if making up his mind as he spoke. "I'll need witnesses in any case. Ordinarily I would of course choose a couple of my officers to assist me in an emergency of this sort, though I must admit I've never faced this particular emergency before. But-very well. You may be there. I must insist upon one thing, however. If this search is successful, you must not radio a news story about it until I give you permission."

“But-“

The captain interrupted Ken. “I’m not trying to censor the press, you understand. But this is a police case, and I can’t take it on myself to let you make public anything which might interfere with their work on it. Naturally, you are perfectly free to send in anything you like about what has happened so far. I am assuming,” he added, with a slight smile, “that you will report the event accurately and no more melodramatically than necessary.”

Ken nodded. “Fair enough, sir, and thank you. We’ll send Global News the bare facts. Later, if something does turn up in the cabin, we’ll send another dispatch telling them to get the further data from your New York office or the police department.”

“Good. Meet me in the dining room outside Gerard’s cabin at eight thirty.” Captain Chisholm waved them both ahead of him down toward the lower deck.

Breakfast might have been an awkward meal, full of spoken-or-unspoken-references to the empty place beside Sandy’s. But passengers and officers alike concentrated on other things. Several times they all got up to peer through the portholes at Gibraltar, now coming closer on the portside, and at the city of Ceuta facing it across the Strait—a crescent-shaped city lying close to the water at the foot of jagged-looking North African hills.

“Just think!” Mrs. Anderson murmured more than once. “We’re practically in the Mediterranean! Just think of it!”

The boys too were caught up in the excitement of sailing into the sea that had been the stage for so much ancient and modern history. But even as they stared at the slowly approaching mass of Gibraltar, rising so abruptly out of the water, and looking so much like the hundreds of pictures they had seen of it, they never completely forgot the appointment that awaited them. It was impossible not to wonder what would be revealed during the search of Gerard’s stateroom, behind the closed door on which the chief steward kept an unobtrusive eye from his place at the table.

By eight thirty the dining room was empty except for the two boys. The Andersons were again on the flying bridge, the officers had disappeared to their duties or to rest, and the mess steward had already cleared away the breakfast dishes and gone below. The Chief Steward remained in the room until he saw the captain approaching, and then he too had departed.

With the captain was Chief Officer Torkling, who had apparently breakfasted in the captain’s cabin where the two men had presumably been catching up on their work as they downed hasty cups of coffee.

Captain Chisholm nodded to the boys, unlocked the door of cabin No. 4, and motioned the others into the room ahead of him. “Mr.

Torkling is also here as a witness," he explained briefly, as he shut and locked the door again.

"Now." Captain Chisholm stood in the center of the stateroom, running his eyes over the two neatly made-up bunks and the room's other appointments. Nothing seemed out of place. Nothing indicated that a man had been living in the room for over a week until the previous night.

"Well!" The captain took a deep breath. "Let's get to work. I've watched customs men search a good many cabins in my time, and I'm aware of their thorough methods. I recall that they always start with the most obvious places, so I'll follow their example."

His sharp eye had already detected a small leather valise standing out of sight beyond one of the chairs, and in an instant he had it open on one of the bunks.

At his commanding gesture, Torkling and the two boys drew near enough to watch his every move. One at a time he lifted out the valise's contents-shirts, socks, underthings-carefully unfolded and shook each garment, then refolded it and laid it on the bunk. When he reached the bottom of the bag he examined all its pockets, and added a bar of soap, a tie pin, and a pair of cuff links to his neat pile.

"How about the lining?" Ken asked. "Has it been slit any place or loosened?"

The captain eyed him briefly and Ken knew his suggestion had been unnecessary. He could feel himself flush.

Inch by inch, the captain went over the bag's interior. When he finished he straightened up. "Are we all agreed that there is nothing in this bag other than what we might expect to find in an ordinary passenger's hand luggage?"

"Nothing," Torkling said, and Ken and Sandy echoed his word.

The captain then repacked the valise, closed, and locked it. Afterward he took a piece of gummed paper from his pocket, dampened it at the sink in the bathroom, and affixed the paper across the lock in such a way that it would be torn if the bag were opened. He wrote his name across the impromptu seal and returned the bag to the spot where he had found it.

Torkling, responding to a glance of the captain's eyes, then opened the drawers beneath the bunks, one after the other. All but the last one were empty. It contained a large traveling case, which the chief officer swung up onto the bunk.

Once again the captain went through his methodical routine, examining every article it contained-more shirts, slacks, a pair of shoes and a pair of sandals, more underwear and socks. Among them he found several packs of tobacco, and he checked them to make sure their revenue stamps were still unbroken. And at the bottom he found

several paper-bound books, which he thoroughly riffled and shook. Afterward, he began to explore the pockets and flaps inside the traveling case.

"Hah!" the captain said suddenly, as his hands reached inside the elasticized flap in the lid.

They all moved closer as he drew out a passport. Ken and Sandy exchanged excited glances, but smiled ruefully at each other an instant later as the captain held it open for them all to see. It was made out in the name of Arthur Gerard.

The captain laid the passport aside and explored the lid flap further. In it he also found a medical form indicating that Gerard had been inoculated for smallpox just before he sailed, and had received three typhoid shots as well. This, too, was laid with the passport. Chisholm's third try brought forth a folder of travelers' checks made out in the name of Arthur Gerard.

Slowly the captain thumbed through the checks, adding the amounts as he went, and holding the folder so that Chief Officer Torkling and the boys could count too.

"Two hundred and thirty dollars?" The captain looked at the others in turn for confirmation.

They all nodded.

"It doesn't seem like a very large sum to cover the expenses of a transatlantic trip," Ken murmured.

"No, it doesn't," the captain agreed. He pulled the elastic flap wide and bent over to look inside it. One object remained at the bottom.

"An ordinary checkbook," he explained, and again they all stood at his shoulder as he went through the flat book. It still contained what appeared to be about half the original number of blank checks it had held, and the last stub showed a balance of nearly seven thousand dollars.

"Whew!" Torkling whistled. "I guess that's why he didn't need more travelers' checks. If he knew people in Europe he would have no trouble cashing one of his personal checks there."

"But we are looking for evidence of a half-million dollars, Mr. Torkling-not a mere seven thousand, however large that may seem to us." The captain was already subjecting the bag's lining to the same kind of examination he had given earlier to the lining of the smaller valise. When he was finished he shook his head, repacked the bag, except for the passport and other items he had laid aside, locked and sealed it, and then stowed it away where he had found it.

The next object of his search was the bureau. He checked the few personal items in its two top drawers, picked up the paper linings in the lower empty ones to make sure nothing was hidden beneath them, then removed the drawers themselves and turned them over to inspect

their undersides.

"Nothing," Chisholm said, when he had finished, and again the others nodded their agreement.

"What about the medicine chest?" Sandy suggested.

"That, too, the captain had already thought of apparently. He was heading for the bathroom even as Sandy spoke. Three minutes later he said once more, "Nothing," and turned his attention to the wardrobe.

Inside this small closet hung a trench coat with a removable inner lining, a brown tweed suit, and a light bathrobe. Each garment was taken from its hanger, inspected with painstaking care, and laid on one of the bunks. And when the closet was empty the captain beamed a strong flashlight inside it, checking every inch of floor and wall.

"Hang the clothes up again," he said to Torkling. "And now," he added a moment later, when that was done, "we'll take a look at the bunks."

Under his direction, Torkling removed every drawer from beneath both sleeping cubicles, so that the captain could inspect the bottom of each and the space from which they had been pulled out. Finally Torkling returned them all to their original position.

"Again-nothing. Very well-the bedding, the mattresses, the springs." Captain Chisholm's competent hand gestured toward the port bunk first.

Pillows were pulled from their cases, blankets and sheets were removed, both mattresses were inspected for signs of tampering, even the springs were subjected to the captain's sharp eyes and prodding fingers.

"Nothing!" The word, in the captain's decisive voice, was beginning to have the monotony of an often-heard refrain.

Ken was about to mention the two upholstered armchairs, but here too the captain had forestalled him. But again a meticulous examination produced no results.

"One thing more." Chisholm pointed to the rug. "We'll have to look under that."

Torkling winced as he started to bend toward the floor.

"If it's O.K. with you, sir," Sandy offered, "I'll get down and bend it back, so that you can see underneath it."

Torkling looked at the captain. Chisholm smiled. "I'm sure it's more than O.K. with our chief officer, son. Go ahead."

Sandy started between the two bunks, pulling back the rug itself first, and then the mat that lay beneath it. He had worked his way almost all round the room, and was pulling at the edge of the rug beside the bureau, when he said, "It's wet here!"

"Not surprising," the captain assured him, gesturing toward the thermos jug and the two glasses in their brackets directly above that

spot. "Mr. Gerard probably spilled some water the last time he poured himself a drink."

They all paused for a moment, as if the captain's reference had brought the quiet, deliberate Gerard alive again before their eyes. Then, at the captain's gesture, Sandy continued.

There was nothing under the rug and nothing under the mat at that point. Sandy was about to let them both fall back into place when Ken quickly bent beside him.

"Something bright there," he muttered, reaching toward the corner formed by the bureau and the wall. The captain's flashlight, shone into the corner, revealed several tiny shards of glass. Ken picked up the largest one of them—a sliver less than an inch long and scarcely a quarter of an inch wide.

"That's evidence, all right," Torkling said, grinning wearily. "Evidence that the room steward isn't doing a thorough job of cleaning."

Ken backed away, so that Sandy could release the mat and rug into place. Still holding the daggerlike sliver of glass, he moved closer to the porthole and held it in the beam of morning light streaming through the circular opening.

"It's silvered," Ken said, "like a mirror. And curved."

Sandy, straightening to his feet, joined him. "Looks like part of a thermos bottle insert. May I?" At the captain's nod of permission he took the thermos jug from its bracket and removed its stopper. "Well, it's not from this one," Sandy reported. "This one hasn't been broken."

"That's hardly what we're looking for, gentlemen," Captain Chisholm pointed out dryly. "In fact, we have not found anything of the sort we were looking for at all. And I believe we have inspected the entire room. Are you all agreed?"

Torkling nodded. Ken and Sandy nodded too, reluctantly.

"Then I think we must assume," Chisholm continued, "—although of course assumptions are not our business—that if Gerard was in the possession of incriminating documents or money, they went down with him."

Torkling smiled at Sandy. "Don't look so glum, young man. Did you really expect to find half a million dollars in nice new bills?"

"Not really." Sandy grinned back at him. "But we did hope maybe we'd find some kind of a clue to—" He let his voice trail off.

The captain, looking very tired now, was moving toward the door. "I'll have a statement typed up

"It's silvered," Ken said, "like a mirror."

"About this search," he said. "As soon as it's ready I'll ask you to read it and sign it—along with Torkling here—as witnesses. You will be available?"

It was Ken's turn to grin. "We're not planning to go any place, Captain."

Outside the door, they all waited while the captain locked and sealed it with another of his strips of gummed paper.

"And remember," the captain said, "you agreed not to send a story about this morning's job."

"We remember, sir," Ken assured him.

Back in their own cabin a few minutes later, having gone first to the radio shack to ask Mike Ingham to send off the message they had prepared earlier for Granger, the boys were silent. Ken dropped into a chair and rested his chin on his hand. Sandy crawled back onto his bunk. Five minutes passed. And then another five. The ship's bell clanged four times.

"Ten o'clock," Sandy muttered. But he made no move to go out to the pantry to join the officers who regularly assembled there for midmorning coffee.

Ken fished in his pocket and gingerly brought up the glass shard he'd found. "Thermos jug," he muttered. "But the thermos jug wasn't broken."

"Maybe Gerard broke one several days ago," Sandy said, sounding disinterested, "and the room steward brought him a new one. Or the jug in that room may have been broken months ago. Those few pieces of shattered glass were under the rug, remember. They could have been there a long time."

"I guess so." Ken got up slowly and put the glass shard in the bureau drawer where he kept his own toilet articles. "I'm probably just peeved because we didn't find anything really significant," he admitted.

Suddenly he swung around. "But look! If I was right about Gerard planning to assume an entirely new identity in some foreign country, he would have had to have a new passport, wouldn't he?"

"Sure. If you were right," Sandy murmured pacifically.

"If he was made executor of a large estate, he must have been experienced and intelligent. And an intelligent man—" Ken broke off, strode to the porthole, and then back to stand beside Sandy's bunk. "He *must* have had a phony passport. And if he did, where is it?"

"Probably was in his pocket when he went over last night." Sandy sounded sleepy.

"Why didn't he carry his real passport in his pocket instead?" Ken asked. "He certainly wouldn't carry the forged one around until he wanted to use it, would he? Suppose it dropped out of his pocket some day and somebody noticed it? It would be too much of a risk."

"You're asking questions that I can't answer," Sandy said. "You know," he went on, "we didn't have a wink of sleep last night. And I

don't know how you feel, but I-

Ken interrupted him firmly. "Don't go to sleep yet! I want to go over something again. From what we know about Gerard, he doesn't seem to have been a consistent character. Let's assume he was intelligent and experienced-he must have been to have held his job. Let's assume he was also ruthless, since he was apparently ready to throw his own career out the window and steal from an estate that he was being paid to protect. Right?"

Sandy nodded. "Right. He was smart. He was ruthless. But then he goes ahead and does something stupid. He doesn't pay a promissory note on time, and brings the whole house of cards down on his head." He blinked, as if surprised that he had arrived at Ken's own conclusion. "I see. So that makes him inconsistent. Well, what if it does? Not everybody's consistent."

"And on top of that," Ken said, brushing aside Sandy's final comment, "he either falls overboard-which is very difficult to do-or he commits suicide, which is the act of an excitable or impetuous person. But remember how slowly he always talked? How deliberate he always seemed? Did he ever give you the impression of being a man who would panic?"

"Committing suicide is the last thing I'd ever have expected him to do," Sandy admitted. "And I must say I can't believe that he simply fell overboard. But he certainly did one or the other. And if it wasn't the one-well," Sandy finished weakly, "then it must have been the other. And where does this all get us, anyway?" he demanded.

Ken stood motionless beside Sandy's bunk for a moment. Then he said slowly, "You're always telling me I get crazy ideas. And I know you're right. And the one I've got right now is crazier than most."

Sandy sighed. "All right. Let's have it."

"I think," Ken said, "that Gerard didn't fall overboard last night. And I don't think he jumped either. I think he's still some place on this ship-hiding until we dock at Valencia, where he plans to sneak off and assume a new identity, complete with false passport. That's what I think."

CHAPTER IV

SEARCH FROM STEM TO STERN

"Wait a minute!" Sandy pleaded, staring. "Remember, Ken, we *saw* the man go overboard!"

"No, we didn't. We saw a figure in the water alongside the ship-saw it for a split second."

"O.K.," Sandy said. "So we didn't see him fall. But the mate did. And, in your own words, we did see him in the water alongside the ship. No one else is missing but Gerard. So how can you possibly say--"

"Perhaps no one is missing from the ship at all," Ken interrupted. "What we saw may have been a dummy."

"A dummy!" Sandy shook his head slowly back and forth. "Look, Ken," he said, "I admit that some of your weird ideas work out sometimes." He held up his hand as Ken opened his mouth to protest. "O.K.-O.K. Oftener than that, maybe. But the point I'm trying to make is that you don't usually pick them out of the air. You usually reach them after some mental gymnastics. Now if you didn't pick this one out of the air, could you start at the beginning and lead me along gently through the exercises of your so-called mind to your so-called conclusion?"

Ken grinned. "It'll take a little doing," he admitted. "I did sort of jump to this particular conclusion."

"Some jump!"

Ken sat down on the chair. "Well, let me see if I can make it sound reasonable. Maybe you can fill in some of the gaps where I leaped." He raised his right fist, forefinger outstretched. "One: we agree from what we can deduce, and from our own observations of the man, that Gerard didn't seem like the sort of person who would fly into a panic and commit suicide. Check?" And when Sandy nodded he went on. "Two: he didn't have enough travelers' checks with him for a smart man who-before he panicked, let's say-planned to become a fugitive."

"Hold it," Sandy said. "He might have had another book of travelers' checks made out in his new name."

"But would he be carrying it in his pocket on shipboard, if he left the other book in his bag?"

"Maybe not," Sandy admitted. "But-" He shrugged. "O.K., I'll give you that-temporarily, at least. But you're forgetting his checkbook. He had a big balance in that bank."

Ken shook his head. "In the first place, we know from Granger, now, that Gerard cleaned out all his bank accounts before he left. In the second place, if he intended using a new name-and we're agreed

that he probably did-a bank account in the name of Gerard wouldn't do him any good."

"O.K., I'll give you that too. Go ahead."

Ken held up a third finger. "Number three coming up," he said. "But now we're getting to some long jumps." He went over to the bureau and got the sliver of shattered glass out of his drawer. "We've agreed that some kind of thermos bottle or jug was broken there in Gerard's room. Those pieces of glass play a very significant part in my theory."

"Any jump you make from them can't be very significant," Sandy said impatiently. "Don't forget that the glass was in a corner, practically covered up by the rug. It might have been there for months. Some passenger, about eight trips ago, might have broken the thermos jug in the room, and the pieces under the rug could have been there until today. How can they mean anything?"

"You're the one who noticed that the rug was still wet, right at that spot," Ken reminded him. "Doesn't that suggest that some kind of a thermos bottle might have been broken there very recently?"

Sandy grinned. "You heard the captain explain how the rug might have got wet, and I must say it sounded reasonable. Nothing surprising in the fact that Gerard might have poured himself a glass of water there, and spilled a little, is there?" He jumped off the bunk suddenly and crossed the room to feel the rug beneath their own jug. "Just as I thought!" he said. "Ours is wet, too, because I spilled water when I was taking a drink yesterday afternoon. We hit a big swell just as I was pouring it and--"

"You win," Ken interrupted him. "Everything you say makes sense and I can't argue with it. But I can also explain the same facts in another way. Like this. Suppose, just for a minute, that Gerard planned to hide out on the ship from the time of a faked suicide until we reach Valencia-in other words, about twenty-four hours or so. He could do without food that long, or easily carry enough in his pockets to last him for that period. But he'd have to make some arrangement for having water. So I'm suggesting that he brought a thermos bottle or two aboard with him, and that while he was filling a bottle-preparing for his hide-out-it dropped and broke. He cleaned up the broken glass and threw it out the porthole, all except the couple of pieces we found."

Ken looked at Sandy quizzically. "Well? Any reason why my explanation couldn't be true?"

Sandy grinned reluctantly. "Oh, it could, I suppose-farfetched as it is. But I'm certainly not going to accept it until we've done a little checking with the room steward. If he noticed a thermos bottle among Gerard's things, for example--"

“Fair enough,” Ken broke in. “We’ll get hold of Joe and ask him that. In the meantime, I’ll give you the rest of my theory.” He held up his fourth finger. “Number four is based on the clothes we saw in Gerard’s closet-and you’ll probably squawk about this one too. There was one brown suit there, plus a pair of slacks in his bag.”

Sandy thought a moment, remembering. “That’s right. One brown suit-his lighter one. He was wearing that darker brown tweed of his at dinner last night. Presumably he was still wearing it when he disappeared.”

“Good.” Ken sounded pleased. “Now think back three or four days ago to the night we had ice cream and chocolate sauce for dessert.”

“It’s a happy thought,” Sandy said, grinning. “I had two helpings and I take pleasure in remembering them both. But what have they got to do with your theory?”

“Something happened at supper that night,” Ken prodded him. “A minor catastrophe.”

Sandy’s brow wrinkled. “Well, when the ship rolled, Gerard’s dessert landed in his lap. Poor Angelo almost wept because he was afraid it was his fault.” He saw Ken nodding at him. “You mean that’s it?” He stared. “But what’s that got to do with-?”

Sandy had been lying flat, head turned toward Ken. Now the whole upper half of his body jerked upright to a sitting position. “Gerard was wearing *gray* tweed that night! I remember because I said it was too bad he wasn’t wearing his usual brown-that brown would have been a better match for the chocolate sauce. He didn’t think that it was a very funny remark. And come to think of it, it wasn’t.” Sandy was speaking more slowly, as if his mind were already somewhere else.

His next words were widely spaced. “I see what you’re getting at-where’s that gray suit?”

Ken spelled it out for him. “According to my theory, it is now at the bottom of the sea. It was stuffed up with something to make the dummy we saw in the water.”

Sandy pulled his ear, and then lowered himself back to his flat position on the bunk again before he said, half reluctantly, half admiringly, “It certainly might have been a stuffed and weighted gray suit we saw, I suppose-with something tied on top for a head. We only saw the figure for a second.” Then he added briskly, “But I won’t buy that until we make sure the suit isn’t around some place. Maybe Gerard asked Joe to clean it for him, after that night.”

“Could be,” Ken admitted. “All right. That makes two items we’ll check with Joe. But if Joe says-“

“Not so fast,” Sandy interrupted. “There are a couple of other little flaws in this weird theory of yours too, you know. A dummy can’t go over the rail by itself. It would have to be thrown. But the second

mate saw Gerard go-or something he thought was Gerard. He certainly didn't see two figures, one throwing the other over. Or are you implying," Sandy added suddenly, "that the mate was in on the whole thing-for a price, maybe?"

Ken frowned. Like all the other officers on board, Second Mate Green had treated Sandy and himself with great friendliness, replying to their perpetual questions, making them feel at home on the *Helen Rogers*. To suggest now that one of those men had been a willing accomplice to a deliberate fraud was difficult.

"I haven't figured out that angle yet," Ken said quietly, in answer to Sandy's question. "But I'm sure that Gerard must have had a confederate on board, if he did what I think he did. He'd need help in order to stow away safely until we reach Valencia. And right now it seems that Green likely was that confederate. He could have thrown the dummy over himself, and then shouted 'Man overboard!' If the confederate was somebody else, he would have had to use some kind of a remote-control gadget-some scheme for pulling the dummy over, maybe, from some other part of the ship."

Ken got up and moved around the neat little stateroom. "I admit that there are some holes in my idea," he muttered. He looked at his watch. "Isn't it about time for Joe?"

Sandy looked at his own watch. "Just about. He usually does our room at eleven, or a little before."

"Good. The sooner we can check up on the broken glass and the gray suit the better."

"In the meantime," Sandy said, "answer me just one question. You're building this entire theory on the grounds that Gerard whipped up a faked suicide after he learned his embezzlement had been discovered. But your theory involves a thermos bottle -which is something most shipboard travelers don't carry-a dummy good enough to fool anybody who might see it, and a confederate who would have to be sold on Gerard's scheme. How could Gerard possibly have arranged all that, in the little time he had after that message from Global News came in?"

Ken was grinning for the first time in many minutes. "This time you've asked me an easy one," he said. "You've hit the central nail of my theory right on the head." He sat down on the edge of his chair, leaning forward eagerly.

"We thought from the start," he said, "that it was strange for a man of Gerard's intelligence and business experience to forget a promissory note. It didn't seem consistent. But suppose we look at it the other way around. Let's say that deliberately 'forgetting' to pay that note was an example of Gerard's intelligence."

"How's that?" Sandy demanded, his eyebrows raised dubiously.

“Take my theory from Gerard’s point of view,” Ken said. “He plans to steal money, and then be declared dead in order to assume a new identity, so that he’ll be safe to use the money undetected. So he decides that one of the surest ways of being declared dead is to ‘disappear’ from a ship at sea, especially if that ‘disappearance’ is actually witnessed. Does this sound logical so far?”

“Go ahead,” Sandy told him, refusing to commit himself.

“All right. Gerard decides to disappear. But he knows that ships have high rails—that people very seldom fall over them accidentally. So he decides not to arouse suspicion by faking an accidental death. Instead, he decides to fake a deliberate suicide—to give himself an apparently excellent reason for jumping overboard. And he does this by ‘forgetting’ to pay that note, so that his embezzlement will be discovered while he’s still at sea. In which case, when he ‘disappears,’ everybody will just say, ‘Poor man, he couldn’t face the disgrace.’ And it won’t occur to anybody that it was a dummy that went overboard, and that Gerard is still alive somewhere in hiding on the ship.”

Sandy grinned. “You mean it won’t occur to anybody except a genius like yourself.” His grin faded. “Well,” he told Ken, “you said in the first place it was a crazy idea—and it certainly is. But I must admit you make it sound pretty logical, provided Gerard didn’t break his water jug during the past few days, and didn’t give his gray suit to one of the crew to be cleaned.”

The knock on their door at that moment put a noisy period to Sandy’s tentative acceptance of Ken’s idea.

“All right to clean up in here now?” the room steward asked when Ken opened the door.

“Sure thing, Joe. We’ll get out of your way in a minute,” Ken assured him, “but we want to ask you something first.”

“Having trouble with your pronunciation again?” Joe smiled. The boys had been studying Spanish during the voyage, and had frequently sought help from Joe and Angelo, natives of Puerto Rico.

“No. This is something else, Joe. And it’ll sound peculiar, but we’ll try to explain later what it’s all about. Do you remember that night when ice cream spilled all over Mr. Gerard’s gray suit?”

The room steward eyed them curiously. “I remember, all right. Angelo told me he’d tried to clean the suit up some, right there at the table, so later I went to Mr. Gerard’s room and asked if there was anything I could do about it. He said not to bother—he’d already sponged it off himself.”

“So the suit didn’t leave the cabin, so far as you know?”

“I know it didn’t. It was hanging right there in his closet when I did his room yesterday morning.”

Ken flashed Sandy a quick glance and then hurried on. “Good.

Now do you know if Gerard broke the thermos jug in his cabin some time during the trip?"

Joe looked more puzzled than ever, but he shook his head. "Hasn't ever been a thermos jug broken on this ship, since I've been doing the rooms. And I've been room steward for the last five trips. Those jugs are pretty sturdy, you know."

"I know," Ken said hastily. "Well, did you ever see a thermos bottle among Gerard's own things?"

Again Joe shook his head. "Might have been one," he said, "but I never saw it. Funny thing for a passenger to have, somehow." He walked past Ken and began to tug at the mattress on Ken's bunk, partially lifting it from its frame so that he could straighten the bedding. "I've got to get busy in here," he murmured.

Ken was aware of the rebuke. "Just one more thing and then we'll be out of your way, Joe. Do you think your vacuum cleaner would suck up a piece of glass this size-if it was in the corner, say, and partly under the rug?" He held out the sliver of glass for Joe's inspection.

"That little thing?" Joe laughed. "Sure it would. Unless it was really caught under the rug."

Ken chewed at his lip. He had no right to tell Joe about the search of Gerard's cabin. And Joe was already, and rightfully, annoyed by the questions that had been fired at him. But Ken knew that the mystery of the shattered glass would remain a mystery unless he could learn-

"But I'll tell you this much," Joe said unexpectedly, breaking into Ken's thoughts. "Nothing like that piece of glass could lie around in any of the cabins of this ship from one trip to another. No, sir. These cabins are all gone over from top to bottom every time we get back to New York-rugs and mats taken up, and each room given a real thorough cleaning. Where'd you get that bit of glass, anyway? You break your thermos jug?" he asked suspiciously.

Ken was grinning. "No, Joe. Ours is all right. This piece of glass is-well, as I said, we'll explain sometime. But right now we'll get out of your way. And thanks, Joe. Thanks a lot. Come on, Sandy!"

Ken led the way in a hurry, out of their room, through the dining room and up the companionway to the boat deck. There, leaning against the rail, he looked at Sandy triumphantly.

"Well, what do you say now?" he demanded. "The suit was in Gerard's closet until yesterday. There was no broken glass in his room when the ship left New York and no thermos jug broken in there since. And if Gerard broke a thermos bottle of his own in there, he made a point of cleaning it up-or trying to clean it up-himself, so nobody would know he'd ever had such a thing. So what do you think?"

Sandy eyed him for a long moment. "There's probably a hole in

your theory some place,” he said finally.

“But if there is, I can’t find it. You’ve sold me! Gerard is somewhere on this ship.”

But Ken looked only briefly triumphant at having convinced Sandy of the logic of his reasoning. “Now what do we do?” he asked uncertainly. “Ask the captain to search the entire ship for a man he assumes is dead? He’d probably throw us overboard for even suggesting it.”

“Of course we have to ask him,” Sandy said firmly. “Do you mean you don’t believe this theory yourself?”

“Oh, I believe it, all right.” Ken pushed back his shoulders. “All right. Come on.”

When they saw the captain he was busy on the bridge, taking a sight through his sextant. They waited until he had finished before they drew close enough to ask if they might speak to him privately.

“Certainly. Let’s go into my office. Now,” Captain Chisholm said a moment later, seating himself and motioning the boys to the bench alongside his desk, “what is it?”

“Well”-Ken hesitated-“it’s a complicated story.”

“Then begin at the beginning,” the captain suggested. “I usually find that’s the best way with a thing that’s complicated.”

Ken smiled at him gratefully, took a deep breath, and plunged in. Bolstering his arguments with the steward’s statements, taking up his case point by point, he outlined the conclusion that he and Sandy had reached. “And so,” he finished, at the end of ten minutes during which the captain had listened without any change of expression, “we think Gerard must still be alive, somewhere aboard.”

“And you want me to search the ship and prove what clever detectives you are, eh?”

The captain’s brisk question, following so quickly on Ken’s last words, made Ken feel awkward and ill at ease. “Well-” he said. And though Sandy nodded encouragingly at him, he didn’t go on.

Captain Chisholm had leaned back in his leather armchair. His eyes seemed focused on some distant object, his fingers were automatically removing pipe and tobacco pouch from his pockets, filling the age-darkened bowl and tamping the tobacco down. The gestures, so like those Pop Allen made when he was thinking through a problem, somehow made the boys feel as if they were back in the *Brentwood Advance* office, awaiting Pop’s invariably wise and patient words.

And when the captain’s pipe was finally burning to his satisfaction, and he spoke in a slow, mild voice, he reminded them of Pop again. “Searching a ship,” he said, “is a considerable undertaking. It makes a lot of fuss-uses a lot of time. Though it’s true,” he added with an

unexpected twinkle, "time is a commodity we have plenty of at sea."

"Of course," Ken said hastily, "if you don't think Gerard could find a place to stow away on this ship."

"Oh, he could do that, all right," the captain said, again unexpectedly. "I have discovered dozens of stowaways in my time. When there's reason enough for people to try to get out of a country, they stow away no matter how carefully a ship is watched."

Sandy spoke for the first time. "Would you say it was impossible for Gerard to have an accomplice aboard?"

"No-o. I wouldn't say that, either. Most of the stowaways I've found," Captain Chisholm explained, "have come aboard with the help of a seaman or an officer. Few of them would have made it otherwise. And no captain can be sure that his crew doesn't include a man or two capable of such connivance against the law." He swiveled his chair in a quarter circle and back again. "You see, a fair percentage of most crews leave at the end of a ship's run. They may not like the ship or"-he smiled briefly-"the captain. Or the ship may be held up in port between trips, and the original crew may not be available for the following voyage. So there are always men aboard of whom I know little or nothing. One of the men of my present crew might have been open to such a suggestion as you believe Gerard must have made to somebody."

"Would there be any way of settling the question," Ken asked, meeting the captain's eyes steadily, "without searching the ship?"

"No way that I know of, young man. I don't like the idea, but neither do I like the idea of having a passenger's suicide on my record. And on my conscience," he added, getting abruptly to his feet.

After that, things happened rapidly. Chief Officer Torkling, summoned to the captain's cabin, was ordered to institute a complete search of the *Helen Rogers*, for the purpose of discovering a possible stowaway. Torkling blinked his blue eyes just once at the request. Then, in typically disciplined fashion, he merely reminded the captain that the forward three cargo holds were filled to the top and couldn't be entered by an inspection gang.

"I know," the captain told him. "Just lift the inspection manholes of those holds, and make certain the cargo hasn't been disturbed or partially removed-unlikely as that would be. But inspect the free spaces in the aft holds thoroughly. And have reports sent here to my office at intervals."

"Yes, sir."

After Torkling left, the boys found it difficult to accept the captain's invitation, which sounded suspiciously like a politely veiled order, to remain with him in his stateroom while the vessel was inspected from stem to stern. But there was nothing they could do.

Angelo was called to serve dinner for the three, but even Sandy found it hard to maintain interest in food as the reports began to come in.

It was clear to Ken and Sandy from the start that the search was being conducted with the traditional efficiency of a well-run ship. Each department head took the responsibility for his own section, and forwarded reports on his progress to the captain in brief word-of-mouth bulletins presented by one of his men.

The chief steward reported that he and a team of three men had gone through all passenger cabins, occupied and unoccupied, all storerooms in his department, the refrigerated room and the cool room, and had found nothing.

The officer heading another team reported that the seamen's quarters had all been similarly searched, with the same result.

The chief engineer reported the fruitless end of a search of his domain-engine room, toolrooms, storerooms, steering engine room, winch-control rooms, and the engineers' own quarters.

The chief officer himself came to the captain's cabin to state that he and two subordinates had inspected the cabins of all the navigation officers, and all the many storerooms under their jurisdiction, including the stowage space inside the streamlined smoke stack.

"The forward hatches are undisturbed, sir," he concluded. "And since all the other subsections are reported in, the only space left to be searched is the aft cargo holds. I'm on my way to take care of them now."

From the moment the idea had occurred to Ken that Gerard might still be alive, he had somehow envisioned him as hiding out in one of the cargo holds. All the hatches had been already covered over with their heavy steel panels and steel-banded waterproof canvas when he and Sandy came aboard, and thus he had no very clear idea of the interior of a hold. But in his mind's eye he saw it as a cavernous space in which-provided it had not been loaded to its very ceiling-a man would have little difficulty concealing himself.

That conviction, plus the nerve-racking strain of waiting in the captain's presence while a large number of men carried out orders based on Ken's own theory, now gave Ken the sudden courage to ask, as Torkling headed for the door, "Could we watch the inspection of the two aft holds?"

"You don't trust Mr. Torkling?" The captain's eyes glinted at his chief officer. "He's got two men with him, you know, and they can't all--"

Ken broke in hastily, aware of the captain's amusement. "Oh, it's not that, sir! It's just that--" The only words that occurred to him sounded frivolous, under the circumstances, but he said them, anyway. "We've always wanted to see what a cargo hold looks like,

and all the holds were covered up by the time we got aboard.”

“Go ahead,” the captain said. “If Mr. Torkling’s willing to have you.” As Torkling nodded at the boys, a faint grin in his blue eyes, the captain added, “But be careful.”

The boys waited in the gangway while Torkling threw the switch that turned the lights on in the aft holds. Then they followed him down to the aft deck. There, two seamen were standing and it was to them Torkling spoke.

“We’ll have the inspection hatch of hold Number 4 opened,” the first officer said, motioning them to precede him across the deck. He gestured the boys ahead of him too, and brought up the rear of the small procession himself.

The deck was wet underfoot from wind-driven spray, and the rolling of the ship made walking difficult. But Ken and Sandy had, in the past ten days, grown accustomed to swaying and leaning with the roll, and they reached the inspection hatch without mishap. The two seamen were already uncovering the round opening in the deck, just behind the canvas-swathed steel panels that roofed the twenty-foot-square main hatch opening. Having manipulated the levers that released the locking arms, they swung the heavy iron cover back. It creaked as it moved. The space gaping below was dimly lighted.

Torkling himself swung first down into the opening, lowering himself some ten feet to the floor of the hold by a vertical ladder. “All right,” he called. “Hang on as you come down.” He stood just to one side of the ladder to watch their progress.

Ken went first, Sandy followed. The two seamen joined them quickly.

They were standing in what the boys knew must be a vast space as wide as the ship, but so packed with goods from floor to ceiling that only a small, square hollow remained at the foot of the ladder, roughly a dozen feet each way. Ken’s ears rang from the reverberations of the engine noises, echoing back and forth between the steel bulkheads. He thought briefly that being inside the hold was like standing inside a huge drum. Most of the floor must be metal too, he decided, although right beneath their feet were the worn splintered planks which covered a big square opening into another hold beneath the one in which they stood.

“Wait a minute,” Torkling said. He bent down, lifted up a round manhole covered like the one they had come through, and looked down into the lower hold. Rough sacking filled the space beneath the hole to within an inch or two of the top. “Flour,” Torkling explained briefly. “And undisturbed since the day we took it on.”

When he stood up and looked around, the boys’ eyes followed his shifting gaze. Part of this hold also held sacks which they assumed

contained more flour-sacks piled solidly to the ceiling aft and to either side of where they stood. The fourth wall of the hollow area was formed of metal barrels, or drums, packed closely together and also piled to the ceiling.

"Soybean oil," Torkling said, indicating the drums. Then, skillfully, he flashed a powerful torch between each two rows, holding it in such a way that he could assure himself the rows ran solidly clear to the bulkhead. Standing just behind him, and looking where he looked, the boys too could see that it would have been impossible for a man to conceal himself among those closely ranged metal cylinders.

"Well, that's that," Torkling said. "This one was easy. But don't worry," he added to the two seamen, "there'll be something for you to do in the next one. Mustn't hurt a seaman's feelings, you know," he told the boys with a grin. "They're never happy if they're not working." The seamen smiled at the joke before they all returned by way of the ladder to the upper deck again.

The inspection hatch ladder down into hold No. 5 was identical to the one they had already descended. But the interior of the big hold itself looked very different. Here, Ken found himself thinking excitedly, a dozen men could be hiding.

The thought came to him, because the first things his eyes lighted on were some dozen jeeps, parked end to end in two rows running along the starboard side of the hold, close to where he was standing at the foot of the ladder.

"There's no hold beneath this level to inspect, so we'll look around these cars first," Torkling said. "You take that aisle," he told the two seamen, gesturing toward the farther row. Then he motioned the boys to follow him, as he walked slowly down the nearer file of cars, pausing to peer inside each one, and to bend down to look under it.

In this hold the engine noises were slightly subdued, but because the hold was partially empty the reverberations in it were much worse. Every sound became enormously magnified as it ricocheted back from the walls.

The boys examined each car, too, as they passed. None showed any sign of being used-or having been used-as a hiding place. Torkling also took a walk along the inner aisle, with the boys following, rechecking the investigation the two seamen had made.

Ken felt his excitement dwindling. The jeeps had seemed such likely hide-outs. And the brief glances he had given to the rest of the hold seemed to offer far less opportunities of proving the truth of the theory he had so confidently expressed. If Gerard was not hiding somewhere in this hold, Ken reminded himself grimly, he wasn't on the ship at all.

After the jeeps had been thoroughly checked, Torkling left the two

seamen near the inspection hatch ladder and led the boys around the roughly rectangular pile of four big packing cases that almost filled the central third of the hold. The cases, jammed tightly together, were individually lashed to the floor by ropes passed through big ring bolts. Two of them, about fifteen feet long each and more than half as high, were the kind of heavy steel-banded plywood boxes which, Ken knew, were sometimes used to transport a whole houseful of furniture from place to place. The other two were smaller—one a cube measuring about eight feet each way, the second a coffin-sized box standing on end. The tops of all of them reached within two or three feet of the ceiling.

“We’d better take a look up on top of those,” Torkling murmured, as they walked between the farthest forward crate and the bulkhead. “Well do it from the far end of the pile. There’s a heap of flour sacks down there we can crawl up on.”

Once in sight of the cargo piled beyond the crates, Ken’s jaw clenched. The whole starboard side of the hold was packed solid with smaller crates stacked as neatly and tightly together as a child’s box of alphabet blocks, and walled into place by crisscrossed timbers.

Not even a cat, Ken had to admit to himself—not even a mouse, for that matter—could have squeezed into hiding among those packing cases.

But there was still the top of the big crates to be explored. A man could easily be lying stretched out up there. Perhaps even now Gerard was holding his breath, a scant few feet above their heads, already aware that his clever scheme had been outwitted—that he was about to be discovered.

Walking briskly along the corridor formed by the four big crates on one side, and the compact walled-in mass of smaller packing cases on the other, they reached the pile of flour sacks which Torkling had mentioned. It almost completely filled the space between the farthest aft crate—the coffin-shaped one—and the bulkhead on that side of the ship. But the pile of sacks slanted slightly inward, in the shape of a sliced-off pyramid, and Torkling climbed the stepped-in row of bags as if they were outsize stairs.

Without waiting for an invitation, the boys climbed after him. And they stood beside him as he flashed his powerful light on the top of the big crates. The one directly in front of them was the lowest of the four. Torkling raised his light, so that the boys could see the tops of the others. It was immediately clear that nothing stirred there, that no irregularity appeared on the surfaces of the wooden crates jammed so snugly together.

“Well, that’s that.” Torkling looked around at the boys, waiting for them to back down from their flour-bag perch so that he too could

descend.

They had no choice. Ken and Sandy regained the floor, Torkling right behind them.

There was no use trying to believe, Ken told himself, that Gerard had been in the hold and had made his way out after the search began. At least two members of the search party had been within sight of the hatch-the only exit from the place-ever since they had come down the ladder themselves.

“Not really very interesting-a cargo hold, is it?” Torkling cheerfully remarked, as they returned along the row of four big crates and rounded the far end, to find themselves once again at the foot of the ladder where the two seamen were waiting.

Sandy glanced briefly at Ken’s clenched jaw and answered for both of them. “It’s interesting to us-never having seen one before, I mean.”

“Well, see one and you’ve seen them all.” Torkling grinned. “All right, men,” he told the seamen. “Back up on deck with you now. Don’t know what made the Old Man think we might have a stowaway aboard this trip, but at least we can assure him now that he was barking up the wrong mast. Right?”

The two seamen grinned at the chief officer’s jovial remark.

“Right,” Ken said bleakly, wishing at that moment that Sandy and he had never left Brentwood.

CHAPTER V

THEORY SCUTTLED

Except for the inevitable hiss of air through the ceiling vents, the cabin was very quiet. Neither Ken nor Sandy felt like talking. Neither had anything to say. They lay flat on their bunks, their bodies weary from a sleepless night, their minds weighted down by the disappointment of the fruitless search. After a while, Ken knew, from Sandy's even breathing, that he had fallen into a sleep of exhaustion. And then suddenly Ken too was asleep.

The loud clatter of the supper bell roused them.

"What is it?" Sandy's red head bounced up from his pillow.

Ken was just opening his eyes. "Look at your watch," he murmured.

"Oh." There was a sheepish grin in Sandy's voice. "Imagine me-of all people-being scared by a supper bell." Lazily he slid off his bunk and stretched. "I feel better now," he said, sounding surprised. "How about you?"

"Oh, I'll live." Ken sat up, rolled his shoulders around to loosen the muscles, and then stretched forward from the waist until his hands touched his toes.

"I'll probably even survive the ribbing we're going to get from the captain and every one of the mates."

Sandy shook his head. "There's not going to be any ribbing. You'll see-Captain Chisholm doesn't want any talk about Gerard, and he'll see to it that the officers don't allow the subject to come up."

Sandy's prediction proved correct. During dinner not a single mention was made of the noon-hour search-the boys suspected the Andersons did not even know it had occurred-and the conversation around the four occupied tables was almost as carefree as it had been before Gerard's mysterious disappearance nearly twenty-four hours earlier. Mike Ingham, probably at the captain's suggestion, had taken Gerard's empty place at the boys' table. During most of the meal, he and Sandy and Ben Sloan kept up a rapid crossfire of talk heavily studded with terms like microwaves, quartz crystals, and oscillators - terms that had very little meaning for Ken.

Ken didn't mind. His own thoughts had returned stubbornly to the missing man. Even if he had wanted to, he couldn't have prevented his mind from re-evaluating each aspect of the puzzle, and trying to evolve another solution from the scanty facts available. But over and over again he rejected the possibility that Gerard himself had jumped or fallen from the flying bridge. Each time he came to the same

conclusion he had reached before: that Gerard was alive and hidden some place on the ship.

When he finished his pie and coffee he caught Sandy's eye and indicated their cabin with a slight jerk of his head. "I don't know about you," he said aloud, "but I'm still sleepy. Coming?"

"If I can walk as far as our cabin," Sandy said co-operatively. "I'm sleepy too."

Both boys got to their feet and made their excuses to Mike Ingham and Sloan.

But once the door had closed behind them, Sandy said accusingly, "You're no more sleepy than I am. So you must be on the track of a new theory."

"Just a new twist to the old one," Ken said, grinning his agreement to Sandy's charge. He sat down and tilted his chair back against the wall to a comfortable angle. "Did you read the addresses on those crates and packing cases in hold 5?"

"A couple of them. Why?"

"Were they directed to Valencia?"

Sandy nodded. "The few I happened to notice, yes." He waited a moment for Ken to explain his question, and when Ken didn't speak, he added, "What have they got to do with anything?"

But Ken asked another question instead of answering Sandy's. "Do you suppose they assign different holds to different destinations? I mean, is all the cargo in hold Number 5, for example, going to be unloaded at Valencia? And all the cargo for Naples, or some other stop on the ship's route, loaded into its own hold?"

"I wouldn't know. But I do know, from that freighter I worked on, that the general idea is to load the ship so that it will be easy to unload. They try to keep all the stuff for the first port of call easily available, so that they can get at it without unloading the whole ship and loading it up again. So I suppose the stuff for Valencia, our first stop, might either be in one hold or-if it balanced better that way-closest to the hatch in any of the top holds. In other words, if I'm not making myself clear, the first stuff to come off should be the last stuff to go on."

"You're making yourself clear in your own wordy way," Ken assured him. Then he added more slowly, "So if Gerard wanted to ship a crate from New York to-say-Valencia, by this ship, it probably would be fairly easy to get at from the hatch openings."

Sandy whistled softly. "So that's it! You're thinking Gerard shipped a big empty crate from New York to Valencia by way of this boat and that he's hidden in that crate now!"

"Well," Ken asked, "isn't it possible?"

Sandy stared reflectively at the ceiling for a long moment. "My

considered opinion is yes and no.”

“What does that mean?” Ken asked. “If it’s possible, it’s possible. If it isn’t, it isn’t.”

“I think it’s possible for Gerard to ship an empty crate to Valencia on this ship, and to get into that crate during the voyage with the help of an accomplice. Remember the waterfront crime ring your father uncovered once? Part of that racket was the smuggling of Allens into the United States with the connivance of some of the stevedores who loaded a ship and some of the seamen who sailed her.”

“I remember only too well,” Ken said. That particular moment in Richard Holt’s career had coincided with a desperate adventure in which the boys had become involved, an adventure described in the press as *The Mystery of the Galloping Horse*. “That’s what made me think in the first place,” Ken added, “that Gerard might have stowed away in one of the holds.”

Sandy nodded. “I thought so. But you weren’t thinking then of Gerard being inside a crate, and I think you may have something there. The trouble is—Wait, I’ll take it in order.” His voice picked up tempo. “Sure, with the connivance of an accomplice on board, an empty crate could have been stowed in an accessible place—accessible from an inspection hatch, let’s say. The crate could have been prepared ahead of time, with padding and air holes. And Gerard could have been shut inside it all right—again with the aid of an accomplice.”

When he paused for breath, Ken said, “So all Gerard would have had to do then would be to wait inside the crate, sipping water from his thermos bottle”—Ken grinned—“until the crate was put ashore at Valencia!”

“Where,” Sandy told him, “he would emerge from his snug hiding place, provided he could open it from the inside, right into the arms of the customs inspectors.”

“Oh!” Ken’s face fell. “I forgot about customs inspection.”

Sandy nodded. “Yes, that’s the snag. That’s the reason for my yes-and-no answer.”

“Oh.” Ken’s enthusiasm vanished. “But wait a minute,” he said quickly, “those waterfront racketeers worked that sort of thing all the time—somehow.”

“They had a real organization,” Sandy reminded him, “on a big scale. They must have had a lot of stevedores and seamen in their pay—men who could walk off the docks in a group, with a couple of stowaways among them. That way they could get past the guards—or the guards may have been in on it too. Or they might have hired barge captains to come alongside the ship at night, so the stowaways could slip overboard and hide out on the barge, and then just go ashore a couple of days later wherever the barge put in at an unguarded dock.”

“Well, couldn’t Gerard have that sort of an arrangement too?” Ken wondered aloud. “After all, with half a million at stake he could afford to hire a good many men.”

Sandy shook his head. “When a criminal organization brings stowaways into the United States, in large numbers, most of them probably are just ordinary guys trying to get into the country in order to take a job there. They probably pay ahead of time, and the men who bring them in probably don’t count on getting more money out of them later on. But Gerard’s case is different,” he pointed out. “A man who’d take a bribe to smuggle Gerard off a ship wouldn’t balk at trying blackmail later on.”

“That makes sense,” Ken said grudgingly. “It would be risky enough, from Gerard’s point of view, to have to hire even one accomplice who would be a threat forever afterward. He certainly wouldn’t want to saddle himself with a dozen or so potential blackmailers. And in that case ...” His voice dwindled away and silence settled over the room again in the face of what seemed an insurmountable obstacle to Ken’s theory.

It was Ken who finally broke the silence, not because he had thought of a way to remove the obstacle, but because it had suddenly occurred to him that perhaps the obstacle didn’t have to be surmounted after all.

“We’re morons!” he exclaimed, bringing the raised legs of his tilted chair back to the floor with a bang.

“I agree,” Sandy assured him. “Wholeheartedly. But what prompted you to make a statement of the fact at this particular moment?”

“Because here we are worrying about how Gerard could get safely out of a crate in Spain, when all we have to do is just check the crates in the hold and find him. After all, if we find him, it won’t make any difference what his scheme was.”

There was a glint in Sandy’s eyes, but his next words contradicted that show of interest in Ken’s latest suggestion. “Have you really got the nerve to ask the captain to have that hold 5 searched again?”

“I don’t know,” Ken admitted. For a moment they looked at each other glumly. Then Ken said, with a glint in his own eye, “But I’ll tell you what I do have the nerve to do—to talk to the captain in a general sort of way until he suggests the search himself.”

“Huh? How’s that?”

“You’ll see,” Ken told him. “But first we have to write up that report he asked us for—the one about what we saw last night. We should have done it before this. Let’s get at it right now.”

In a sudden burst of energy he was hauling his typewriter out of one of the big drawers beneath his bunk as he spoke.

Fifteen minutes later the job was done. At the end of the sixteenth minute they found Captain Chisholm on the bridge, sextant in hand, waiting for a break in the overcast so that he could take a star sight. The wind was coming from the northwest and the big swells were making the ship roll and wallow heavily. Spray whipped up by the wind dashed over the portside in hissing sheets. The ship's bell tolled off seven o'clock as the captain turned to them.

"Ten more hours," he said, "and you can stretch your legs ashore in Valencia. Unless," he added, "this wind shifts more to the north. Then it might take us eleven or twelve hours to make port."

Ken was about to hand the captain their typed report when Chisholm suddenly lifted the sextant to his eye again and peered through it intently. A narrow slit had appeared in the cloud curtain and he was fixing his sight on that patch of star-studded sky.

The boys knew better than to speak to him at that moment. They watched in silent admiration as he delicately manipulated the adjusting knobs of his instrument. A few seconds later he had lowered the sextant, glancing at his watch as he did so, and hurried inside the wheelhouse to make the necessary computations.

The boys leaned against the rail to await the captain's return. They were still there when Second Mate Green came out of the wheelhouse, nodded at the boys with his usual sardonic grin, and joined them at the rail. "Good roll tonight," he said conversationally. "Bother you at all?"

The boys shook their heads.

"We feel fine," Sandy assured him. "Guess we're just born seafarers." He tried to speak naturally, but Ken could sense the effort behind his tone. Having once agreed that the second mate, of all the men aboard, was the one most likely to have aided Gerard in a deception, it was now difficult to speak to him as easily as they always had in the past.

Ken decided to tackle directly the subject he suspected was uppermost in all their minds.

"We're sending dispatches back home on Mr. Gerard's disappearance, Mr. Green," he said. "Would you mind answering a few questions about it for us?"

"It's not that I'd mind," Green said easily, "but I'll have to beg off just the same. The captain has issued instructions against discussing the incident."

"That's right. I have." Captain Chisholm was suddenly beside them again, having concluded the recording of his star sight with his usual swiftness. With a brief nod at the boys, Green returned to the wheelhouse and his supervision of the helmsman.

"I'm considering the Gerard incident closed," Captain Chisholm

went on crisply. "When we reach Valencia, I'll make my reports and let the authorities take over from there. And I must say I'll be glad to see the end of the affair."

"That's certainly understandable," Ken murmured respectfully. "The responsibility of a ship's captain must seem very heavy at a time like this. Oh, yes," he added quickly, as if just remembering, "we brought you this, Captain. It's the report you wanted on what we saw last night."

"Oh, good. Thank you. You've kept it brief, I see." He had glanced at the typewritten sheet without attempting to read the words. "That's fine. And I'd also like to thank you for suggesting the search of the ship. It's a possibility that wouldn't have occurred to me-the idea that Gerard might still be alive, that is-but now I'm glad I'll be able to report that we took even that remote contingency into consideration."

"We want to thank you too," Ken told him, "for letting us see the two holds while Chief Torkling had them open. He certainly seems to know his job," he added admiringly, hoping he wasn't overdoing the role he had chosen for himself. "I suppose while we were gawking around at the cargo, he was studying every one of those big crates in hold 5, to make sure Gerard hadn't concealed himself inside one of them."

"Inside-!" The captain broke off abruptly after repeating the one startled word. "No," he went on after a moment, "I don't know that he did study the crates with that possibility in mind. I doubt if it occurred to him-it certainly didn't to me. Until," he added slowly, "you two came up here with the express idea of putting the thought into my mind."

Ken, as startled as he sometimes was by one of Pop Allen's uncannily accurate guesses, opened his mouth to answer but found himself unable to speak.

Sandy leaped into the breach. "We came up as soon as we'd finished that report," he said, gesturing toward the paper the captain still held. "We didn't get at it until after dinner. We should have done it before, but this afternoon we--"

But Sandy too ran out of words as the captain began to shake his head thoughtfully. "You may have come up as soon as you finished this," the round-faced man said, "but you also came with this bee in your bonnet. Didn't you?" He peered sharply through the darkness, first at Sandy and then at Ken.

"Yes, sir," Ken told him quietly. "We do think Gerard might be inside one of those crates. And I think we could tell by looking at the crates-I mean, I think somebody could tell-because Gerard would need holes of some sort in the walls of the crate, so that he could breathe."

The captain didn't comment on Ken's statement immediately. He

waited long enough for the ship to roll widely to port and then to starboard again.

"Very well," he said then. "I tell you frankly I think another examination of the hold will be useless and a waste of time. But I wouldn't want you, or anyone else"-his emphasis on the last words suggested that it was not the boys who were uppermost in his mind-"to think I had not exhausted every conceivable opportunity. You may go along on the search if you wish."

"Thank you, Captain Chisholm," Ken said. "We-"

The captain silenced him with a wave of the hand. "I am not doing this as a personal favor to you," he reminded them brusquely. "I am doing it only to settle the Gerard affair once and for all. I'll send Mr. Green. He's a very competent man. And I presume you two will also use your eyes-will not merely be 'gawking,' as you say you did when you were below earlier."

"Yes, sir!" Sandy assured him. "I mean-no, sir."

But Captain Chisholm appeared not to notice the boys' embarrassed confusion. He was summoning Green from the wheelhouse and telling him to inspect hold No. 5 with an eye to any crate that might be used as a hiding place for a man.

"By which I mean, of course," the captain added precisely, "Mr. Gerard. These two young men will accompany you," he concluded.

Green pursed his lips in a soundless whistle, but his only response was a clipped, "Yes, sir." Then he gestured to the two boys ahead to precede him out of the captain's presence.

None of them spoke as they made their way to the aft deck, pausing only at the electric panel to switch on the lights in hold No. 5. Ken wished that some other officer than Green had been assigned to the search, but told himself that if their suspicions of Green had any basis in fact, the man's reactions would be worth watching. But he was unprepared for Green's direct question, spoken as he bent over the inspection hatch and moved the levers to unlock it.

"Who thought up this wild idea that Gerard might be alive and hiding in a packing case?" the second mate asked, looking up at the boys. "It doesn't sound like the Old Man."

"I guess he thinks we're responsible for the idea," Ken told him, trying to keep the stiffness out of his voice.

"Oh. I see. That explains why he sent you down here with me. If you don't mind my saying so, I was wondering about that too, since the holds are normally out of bounds to passengers." His sardonic grin showed faintly in the cloudy darkness. "I guess your reputation as detectives must have made quite an impression on him. Maybe I should have listened more myself when Mrs. Anderson was describing some of your exploits."

The hatch cover came up silently as he spoke,, and Green started down the ladder. "O.K.," he said. "Come on."

He waited for them while first Ken and then Sandy reached the floor of the hold. "So we're looking for a crate that a man might hide in. That means we can eliminate immediately all those too small to hold a man. Right?"

"Sure," Sandy agreed.

Ken was glancing to his right at the two rows of jeeps, which had been so thoroughly explored that afternoon by Torkling and his men. To his left was the tightly crammed row of four huge solid-walled packing cases running almost all the way from the aft part of the hold to its forward bulkhead. At the aft end of the row was the pile of flour bags on which Torkling, Sandy, and himself had climbed. And beyond the four big packing cases, separated from them only by a narrow aisle, was the pile of various-sized crates that reached to the ceiling and was walled in by crisscrossed timbers.

"This whole row here seems to be just four big cases, doesn't it?" Green was saying, walking toward the row of big boxes. "Any one of them could hold a man. But do you see any signs of human habitation? You're the detectives-you tell me."

Obligingly he pulled a flashlight out of his pocket and began to run its beam along the nearest one.

"I suppose there'd be air holes of some kind," Sandy was muttering uncomfortably.

Like the other three, this steel-banded crate was built of heavy plywood. A single unjoined sheet, braced along its center by a three-inch board and framed in one-by-threes, had been used for each wall, and the adjoining frames were screwed together. Ken could see that more than fifty screws would have to be removed, and the steel bands cut, before a single wall of the crate could be detached.

The crates sat flat on the floor, which meant that any holes in their undersides would be useless for admitting air to the interior. And the crates were jammed so snugly together, under their rope lashings, that holes in one of the concealed end walls would also be useless for that purpose.

When they had made a slow circuit of the four big crates, exploring every exposed surface and finding them all solid, Ken reminded Green that they must inspect the tops too. So, one by one, they climbed the pile of flour bags and Green flashed his light along the upper surfaces of the wooden boxes.

"Do you mind if I crawl along up there?" Ken asked.

"Mind?" Green sounded surprised. "Of course not. Looks like a fool's game to me, but if it amuses you to get filthy, go ahead."

"We'd never be certain otherwise," Ken murmured.

“Sure. Sure, I suppose you’re right. I’d offer to go myself, but a young man like you is probably more limber for a job like that than I am.”

“I’ll do it, Ken,” Sandy muttered.

“No,” Ken told him. “There probably isn’t room enough for you up there. Give me a hand.”

The redhead boosted Ken onto the top of the nearest crate—the coffin-shaped one standing on end. From there Ken hoisted himself onto the next crate in the row, the cube-shaped one standing a foot or so higher. He had to move forward on his hands and knees, exploring the dusty surface as he went with his fingers and with the flashlight Green had thrust into his hand.

It was not a job he would have chosen for fun, Ken reflected grimly. There was very little clearance between the crates and the ceiling, and the framing that surrounded the plywood top of each of the big boxes cut into his knees as he crawled slowly forward.

At the edge of the last big crate Ken stopped. From that point his light could explore the entire surface ahead of him. It was as solid and unmarred by holes as the three crate tops he had already traversed.

Ken could almost taste his sense of bitter disappointment. None of the crates in the huge pile across the narrow aisle to his right was as large as these four. One of these was by far the most obvious hiding place in the hold. But if none of them contained any air holes, Ken felt he must be on the wrong track. He doubted that even the two largest of these contained enough air to keep a man alive for twenty-four hours.

Laboriously, wincing when the rough boards thrust splinters into his hands and knees, Ken inched his way back to his starting point. Sandy awaited him there. Green was leaning patiently against the bulkhead below.

“No luck?” the second mate asked.

“No luck,” Ken repeated. He couldn’t bring himself to meet Green’s glance, although he told himself he should be studying the man’s face to see if he looked relieved or merely amused.

“Well, we’ve still got this pile over here to look at,” Green said, as Ken and Sandy joined him on the floor.

Ken handed the second mate the flashlight, and Green conscientiously ran it up and down the ceiling-high pile, moving forward only a few inches each time, so that the single exposed side of each crate forming the front wall of the pile could be studied individually.

The crates in this section of the hold were of many different sizes and types. They ignored only those obviously too small to hold a man. That left, Ken calculated roughly, several dozen at least. Some were

made of solid plywood, like the three big cases at their backs. Some were formed of heavy slats, fastened together with wide spaces between the individual boards.

Ken, Sandy, and Green all inspected each one of the slatted crates, poking the flashlight between the strips of wood to illuminate what was inside.

One whole group contained closely ranged metal tins which Ken judged to be five-gallon size.

Another group contained irregularly shaped objects wrapped in heavy waterproof material. But though each of those crates might possibly have held a man, the material-protected object inside each of them was considerably smaller than a man's hunched body. Ken guessed that each one was a piece of machinery, bolted to a solid floor and surrounded by a slatted frame for easier handling.

Only at the end of the long row did Ken's hopes revive again. There they found several large slatted crates whose interiors were concealed by a lining of waterproof paper fastened to the inside of the slats themselves. Instinctively Ken reached out a hand to touch the paper.

"Don't break through it," Green cautioned. "Whatever is inside there probably has to be protected from the weather." He moved his flash until it focused on the stenciled letters along one slat. They read: *Alden Machinery Company*. "Just as I thought," Green said. "We carry a lot of their stuff, and it always needs special care in handling, so that no hooks break through that paper. I don't know what kind of machinery Alden makes, but it must be delicate."

Ken didn't try again to touch the paper. He knew that it was a pointless thing to do in any case. If there were holes in it, they would be visible. And if there were no holes-Ken swallowed another sigh - they would be just as airtight as if they had been made of solid wood.

The last crates they inspected were also slatted, but lined with wire netting which exposed their contents clearly.

Green, peering in at the narrow metal cylinders that one contained, said, grinning, "Well, I don't know what they are, but none of them is alive."

"I guess that's that," Ken said heavily. "I guess nothing is alive down here but us."

"Looks like it."

To Ken's ears the three words sounded cheerfully triumphant, but he didn't betray that fact. And he admitted, even to himself, that the note he had heard in Green's voice could have been simply amusement over the idea of a man hiding in one of the crates-or, more simply still, relief at having finished a dull and unpleasant job.

None of them spoke until they had made their way up on deck

again, and waited for Green to lower and fasten the hatch cover.

But Green muttered something as he jammed the locking levers home. When he straightened up he was pulling a rag from his pocket and wiping his hands.

“Got grease all over me,” he explained, turning to lead the way over the open deck. “But I guess that comes of having an unusually efficient maintenance crew. And as an officer of the *Helen Rogers* I probably shouldn’t complain about that.”

“And as detectives,” Ken thought miserably, “we shouldn’t complain either. We’ve certainly been given every chance to prove a theory-and we’ve certainly failed.”

CHAPTER VI

UNGUIDED TOUR

"Want me to tell the Old Man that we drew a blank on our search?" Green asked, as he paused beside the electric light panel when they had come inside the ship's housing. "Or do you want to discuss it with him yourselves?" Again his voice held that note of amusement.

"I guess there's nothing to discuss," Ken said. His conscience told him that he had no right to weasel out of seeing Captain Chisholm and admitting to him that once more he had involved a member of the ship's staff in a wild-goose chase. But the idea of appearing before the captain right then, especially in his grimy and disheveled condition, was more than he could face.

Sandy came unexpectedly to his rescue. "Ken wouldn't be allowed on the bridge looking like that," he said with a grin. "He'd give the *Helen Rogers* a bad name for years. I think he'd better have a shower before he shows himself in public-if you don't mind reporting to the captain yourself, that is."

"Mind?" Green grinned. "I spend half my life reporting to the Old Man. It's second nature to me by now. Don't worry," he added, as if in reassurance. "Til let him know we did a good, thorough job of it. And I expect this really will wind up the Gerard business. We'll all be glad to close the books on it, eh?"

"Thanks," Ken murmured, in response to the earlier part of Green's speech. He couldn't help wondering if the second mate's final question was intended as a dig at them for the detective exploits Mrs. Anderson had so glowingly described. If that's what it was, he told himself, he himself certainly deserved it. But it didn't seem fair that Sandy too should be blamed for what had been, all along, Ken's own stubbornness. And if he could have thought of a way to assume all the responsibility himself, he would have done so immediately. But his brain seemed numb. Later, he thought vaguely; later he would explain it all to the captain.

He heard Sandy saying, "It's always good when these things are cleared up. O.K., Mr. Green. Thanks a lot. I'll see to it that Ken gets some of this dirt scrubbed off him now, and we'll see the captain later. We can thank him, then, for letting us prowl around down there."

Green laughed. "You'll be the only ones who ever thanked him for that particular favor," he said. And then he snapped the light switch for hold No. 5 and disappeared up the stairs that led to the bridge deck.

“Come on.” Sandy was prodding Ken down the corridor toward their room.

They had to cross through the dining room to reach their doorway, and Ken was moving unseeingly through it when a hoot of laughter sounded nearby. Instinctively he turned in its direction. Chief Officer Torlding and Mr. Anderson were sitting at one of the tables, over empty coffee cups.

It was Torkling who had laughed. It was Torkling who demanded, with hearty good nature, “What have you been doing? Cleaning out the stack? Didn’t know we were so understaffed we had to call on the passengers for that.”

Ken couldn’t let Sandy answer for him this time. “We’ve been down in the hold again, Mr. Torkling,” he said, trying to manage a grin to accompany the words. “Proving that the captain is smarter than we are.”

“Down in the hold!” Mr. Anderson exclaimed. “I thought there was a rule against passengers going down there.”

“There is.” Ken felt sure he was now producing a real grin. “We’ve also just proved how wise that rule is.”

Then Sandy reached past him, opened their door, and thrust Ken inside. The click of the closing door, Ken told himself wryly, marked the end of one Holt-Allen adventure that would certainly never make headlines for Global News.

“Hurry up and get a shower,” Sandy said briskly. “I want to talk to you.”

“You don’t have to be in such a rush,” Ken told him, unbuttoning a shirt that was streaked with black. “In fact, you can relax entirely. You can’t think of anything to say to me that I haven’t already said to myself.”

Sandy looked surprised. “You mean about the grease?”

“The grease?” Ken echoed blankly.

“Hah!” Sandy crowed. “I thought you hadn’t noticed it! That’s what you get for not having a brilliant mechanical mind, like mine. Go on—take a shower, will you?”

Even when he stood under the stinging spray, letting it sluice away the dirt and some of his weariness, Ken couldn’t be certain Sandy meant what he seemed to mean—that he had suddenly acquired a new confidence in Ken’s theory at the very moment when Ken himself was reluctantly admitting it couldn’t be proved.

“Grease,” Sandy had said. But what could grease have to do with Gerard’s disappearance? What could Sandy have learned that would contradict the indisputable lack of air holes in all the crates, and the fact that none of them looked as if they could be easily and quickly opened?

Ken tilted his face up to the stream of water and deliberately pushed the questions out of his mind. He was in no condition for mental gymnastics, in no condition to figure out Sandy's cryptic remark.

Suddenly a particularly heavy roll of the ship made him grab at the support fastened to the shower wall, to keep his balance. The movement jerked him out of the half-asleep state he had been drifting into. He turned the water off and reached for a towel.

Anyway, he told himself, he felt better. He even tried to convince himself that it would be a fine thing now to fall into bed and have a long, solid night of rest. By morning the *Helen Rogers* would be docking in Valencia, and he and Sandy would have a lot of exploring to do. Yes, he repeated firmly, a good night's sleep was what he really wanted-what they both needed.

"Well, it's about time!" Sandy said, when Ken emerged into the stateroom tying the belt of his robe around his waist. "You certainly took long enough."

The redhead was sprawled out on his bunk, flat on his back, with an open tin of peanuts resting on his chest, and he reached for another handful as he spoke. But his next words proved that he was not thinking about what he ate.

"That hatch cover has been freshly greased," he said decisively. "Remember how the one on Number 4 hold squeaked? This one didn't. And Green got grease on his hands when he closed it."

"So?" Ken asked. "Is that significant of anything but the fact that, as Green said, the *Helen Rogers* has an efficient maintenance crew?"

"What kind of a maintenance crew greases one hatch cover only?" Sandy demanded.

Ken shrugged.

Sandy, ignoring his lack of enthusiasm, hurried on. "No, sir. I'm positive that hatch cover has been greased so that Gerard-and maybe his accomplice too-can get in and out of the hold fast and without making any noise. The trouble is, as you said earlier, I'm a moron."

"I made the remark about both of us," Ken told him. "But I'd already decided it ought to apply just to me. Or are you now admitting you're a moron to say this grease means anything?"

"No. I'm saying I was a moron not to notice it earlier. I didn't tumble to it until we were on the way out of the hold. If I'd only seen it on the way down-" He shook his head in disgust at himself.

"What are you getting at?" Ken wanted to know. "And what difference would it have made if you'd seen it earlier?"

"I'm getting at the fact that now, air holes or not, I'm convinced Gerard is down there some place."

Ken grinned faintly. "This is one of your rare but famous

hunches?"

"Call it that." Sandy tossed another peanut into his mouth. "Sure, I guess it's a hunch, all right-nothing more. But I couldn't be any more positive than-than--"

"Than I was myself a while ago?" Ken offered.

Sandy grinned. "I guess that would describe it. But I could prove I was right if only I'd noticed the grease earlier. Then we'd have known enough to note down the names and addresses of the senders and receivers of those crates. With them, I think we could establish Gerard's presence in one of those crates without lifting a finger. Anyway," he corrected himself, "without lifting more than a pencil."

Ken sat down slowly in a chair and tipped it back until it rested against the wall. "Take it from the beginning, will you? You lost me quite a while ago."

"Why, certainly." Sandy gave him a lordly smile. "And a pleasure it will be, if I may say so, to be expounding a theory of my own for a change, instead of always listening to one of yours."

"And a pleasure it will be to listen," Ken assured him. "You may proceed." He answered the lordly smile with a lordly wave. There was no doubt about it now. He was feeling a great deal better than he had felt when they entered their room, but he no longer had any desire at all to go right to bed.

"The crux of the matter is this," Sandy said. "If Gerard put an empty crate aboard this ship, to use later as a hiding place, the names of both the sender of the crate and the receiver must be phony."

"The name of the sender might be Gerard's own," Ken pointed out. "And the receiver's name might be the new name Gerard planned to use abroad."

"If that's what he did, that would certainly be suspicious in itself. If any of those crates was shipped by Arthur Gerard, I bet even the captain would be willing to open it-just in case. No, I'm sure Gerard used phony names."

"But why?" Ken asked. "Why couldn't Gerard have shipped the crate to somebody he knows in Valencia, for example, and used the name of some friend back in the States as a sender?"

"Because in that case both sender and receiver would be in on his secret, and would be constant blackmail menaces to him for the rest of his life, unless he paid them off so handsomely right away that he wouldn't have much of his embezzled money left."

"He might have used the name of that big machinery company that-according to Green-ships so much stuff," Ken pointed out. "He wouldn't even have to let the company know he was using it. If he just stenciled that name on the crate-" He stopped because Sandy was shaking his head.

“Impossible,” Sandy said firmly. “He would have had to fake shipping numbers, bills of lading, and dozens of other forms that big business uses to keep track of shipments abroad. Long before the *Helen Rogers* was halfway to Europe, both the shipping company and the machinery company would know that there was one crate too many aboard the ship.

“Maybe he could manage it,” Sandy admitted, “if he paid people all along the way to help him, provided he could find men willing to accept his bribes. But I thought we’d agreed he wouldn’t want to take so many people into his confidence.”

“Sure. I guess we did.”

“Right. So we don’t think he let himself get mixed up in some big shipment. So that means his crate would have to be sent by an individual and received by an individual. And the names would have to be either his own, which would be suspicious, or completely phony. Which brings me to my point: if we could check the genuineness of the senders and receivers of all crates big enough to hold a man, and found that one set was phony, we’d know pretty certainly that Gerard was inside that crate.”

“All right. I follow you that far. And I suppose you think checking up on those names in the middle of the Mediterranean-” Ken stopped abruptly. “Global could do it!”

“Exactly,” Sandy agreed. “If we’d written the names down while we were in the hold, the checking could be under way right now. It’s only eight o’clock—that’s two in the afternoon in New York. Offices are still open. It would be a cinch.”

Ken let the front legs of his chair come slowly to the floor. “But we personally looked over all those crates and saw absolutely no signs of-“

“Forget that,” Sandy interrupted, as determined to promote his own theory now as Ken had been earlier that day. “Gerard might have figured out any of several gimmicks that would make air holes unnecessary. Any amateur magician could do that much-anyway, I think he could. If we could just check those names-“

“But we don’t know what the names are,” Ken cut in. “And this time I’m not going to try to convince the captain to let us go down there again. I don’t think you are either,” he added, “after the fine detective record we’ve already run up today.”

Sandy did not answer for a moment. Then he said slowly, “Suppose the captain didn’t know we went down there? It’s dark. That hatch cover is greased-it doesn’t make any noise. We wouldn’t need the hold lights, we’ve got flashlights in our bags.”

Ken could feel the short hairs prickling at the back of his neck. Part of the sensation was sheer excitement at the thought of redeeming

themselves, of proving that the theory which had been the cause of so much amusement might after all bring a criminal to justice. But another part of the sensation, he realized, was plain ordinary fright. There was something eerie about those vast murky holds. The idea of creeping down into one of them, alone, and at night, was very definitely unpleasant.

There was a ship's law against passengers going into the holds, he reminded himself. So they really shouldn't—

But there was a more important law, a law against theft and embezzlement. And if Gerard had broken that law, and was about to escape into anonymity with half a million dollars that belonged to someone else—

"Does the idea scare you?" Sandy's words broke into the pattern of Ken's thoughts. "I'll admit it does me."

"Sure," Ken said. "Plenty. But I'm more scared at the idea of a criminal getting away with something because we were the only ones who could stop him, and we didn't make one last attempt." He got to his feet, untying the belt of his robe with one hand and reaching for his clothes with the other. "Is the dining room clear? I'd rather not answer questions about this expedition until it's over."

They exchanged a brief grin of understanding as Sandy jumped lightly down from his bunk and crossed to their door. Cautiously and soundlessly he opened it a crack and then closed it again.

"Anderson's gone," he reported. "But Torkling's still there and Green's with him-and they've got full cups of coffee in front of them"

Ken nodded, pulling on a pair of black corduroy slacks that would be invisible in the darkness. "We should have known Green would be out there. He goes off watch at eight and always comes down for coffee then."

Now that they were both on their feet they became aware that the rolling of the ship had increased considerably during the past half hour.

Ken lost his balance, half in and half out of his slacks, and had to grab at the bureau for support. Sandy, moving from the door to the closet to get their dark leather jackets, was flung against the wall so hard that the sound of his elbow cracking against the hard surface made a loud noise in the room.

"If we can't get on with this job pretty soon," he muttered, "we'll be thrown right off the deck trying to get to the hatch. Besides, we want to give Global as much time as possible to check those names before all the offices close." He rubbed his bruised elbow. "Couldn't Green have skipped his coffee tonight?"

"Take it easy," Ken told him. "Torkling probably will go up on the bridge with the captain pretty soon, if it's really getting rough. And

Green doesn't ever sit very long out there when he's by himself."

Three minutes later they were ready to go. Each had a flashlight in his pocket, and Ken had made sure that he had a pencil and several sheets of paper. There was nothing more they could do in the way of preparing themselves for their venture. And waiting didn't increase their enthusiasm for the job they had set themselves.

Once more Sandy opened the door a crack and closed it again. "Still there," he muttered impatiently. "Haven't they got anything better to do?"

For a moment Ken forgot his nervousness. "Better than eating?" He grinned. "I didn't know there was anything better-in your vocabulary."

"All right." Sandy's grin was an admission in itself. "I guess I'm not feeling quite my usual self at the moment. I wish this trip were already over."

"So do I," Ken agreed.

Three times more they peered cautiously out into the dining room, with the same result.

"Global won't have time to check the names if we don't get the list sent off to Granger pretty soon," Sandy fumed after the last one.

They were both lying flat on their bunks by then, to reduce as much as possible the effect of the ship's increased rolling. For the first time during the whole voyage, Ken's stomach felt distinctly queasy. But he suspected the rough weather was only partly responsible for that. Once he and Sandy had returned from the hold, he felt sure that the discomfort would quickly disappear.

"Granger works fast and he's got a big organization," he reminded Sandy now. He knew that Sandy didn't need the reminder, but it was easier to talk than to lie silently thinking about the gaping blackness of hold No. 5.

Ten long minutes later Sandy eased the door shut again. His face looked pale in the light of the small reading bulbs glowing over their two bunks. "AH clear. Let's go."

Without speaking again they slipped into their jackets, turned out the lights, and moved as quietly as possible out of their room, through the dining room, and along the corridor leading aft. At its far end they opened the door, bracing themselves against the gust of wind that thrust it back at them, and stepped out onto the small landing at the top of the flight of narrow steps to the deck below. Then they were going down the steps, clinging to the handrail, ducking their heads to avoid the shafts of light striking through two illuminated portholes. Except for those two beams, the whole aft section of the ship was in complete darkness.

The ship pitched and rolled beneath them, and even when their

rubber-soled feet were on the flat deck, it was difficult to keep their balance. Somewhere above them a slack steel boom cable slapped viciously at the mast with each heave of the vessel. Wind-whipped spray stung their faces each time a swell crashed against the ship's portside, and they walked through a film of water flowing across the deck to pour back into the sea through the ship's scuppers.

Slowly, carefully, they passed the huge canvas-covered loading hatch of hold No. 4, edged around the small steel structure housing the winch controls, and made their way past the loading hatch of hold No. 5. At the end of that big hatch was the small round cover of the inspection hatch.

By the time they reached it, their eyes had become somewhat accustomed to the darkness of the cloudy night. Now they could distinguish the faint and constantly heaving line between black sea and almost equally black sky. They could see the *Helen Rogers'* rounded stern rise and fall in great, slow dips.

Ken, in the lead, waited until Sandy was close behind him and then said quietly, against Sandy's ear, "I'll open it and go down first. You come after me and close the hatch."

Sandy's nod was barely perceptible, but his hand squeezing Ken's arm was a gesture that said plainly, "Sure. Go ahead."

They did not have to remind each other that they wouldn't dare turn on their flashlights until they were both inside the hold with the cover shut over their heads.

Ken bent down, groped for the handles that controlled the locking levers, and then turned them slowly as he had seen Green do more than an hour earlier. The greased levers moved silently, though if they had squealed like banshees the sound could scarcely have been noticeable above the creakings and groanings of the heaving ship at that moment.

The round cover came upward under Ken's cautious heave. He lifted it only a scant two inches at first, to assure himself that no light was glowing inside the hold. Then he pulled it upright and let it swing back on its hinges until it lay flat on the deck.

Ken knelt squarely on the deck momentarily, ignoring the salt water that soaked instantly through his slacks, and bent his head until it was thrust clear inside the hold. Then he straightened, extended one leg inside the opening and explored the darkness with his toe until it felt the first rung of the ladder.

"Got it," he muttered under his breath. The next moment he was lowering himself by the iron rungs into the black depths of the ship.

When his feet encountered a solid floor he looked back upward toward the barely discernible circular opening over his head. It was already partially blocked by Sandy's figure, starting downward. Ken

could follow his progress more by watching that opening than by what he could see of Sandy himself.

After the big redhead had descended the first few steps of the ladder, he clung to a rung by one hand and used the other to lift the hatch cover, swing it up over the opening, and lower it slowly into place, ducking as it came to rest above his head.

With the hatch cover closed, the hold was in Stygian darkness. Ken didn't know Sandy had descended until he felt another breathing body beside his own.

Ken flicked his flashlight on then, and Sandy's beam slashed into the blackness an instant afterward.

For a moment, when he had been opening the hatch cover, it had occurred to Ken that Gerard's accomplice-if such a man existed-might be down in the hold at that very moment. That was why he had thrust his head into the opening before he descended. But no telltale light had revealed another person's presence, and Ken had felt certain that he and Sandy were the only people inside the hold -with the possible exception of Gerard himself, shut inside a concealing crate.

But now, with the slender beams of their flashlights emphasizing, rather than dispelling, the cavernous gloom of the hold, Ken had to repress a shudder at the sudden sense that he and Sandy were being watched.

"Let's hurry up," he breathed.

Above Sandy's flashlight he could see the redhead nodding vehement agreement.

They took one stride toward the row of big packing cases lashed to the floor in the middle of the hold, and then had to stop, clutching at each other, as the ship climbed and twisted over a mountainous wave. But they recovered their balance quickly and moved ahead.

Ken's beam swept back and forth across the side walls of the four big cases. All of them appeared to be blank.

"Names must be on the other side," he muttered, leading the way around the aft end of the pile, between the final crate and the bulkhead, and passing into the narrow aisle that divided the row of big crates from the timber-protected pile of smaller crates on the starboard side of the hold.

"Or on top," Sandy suggested.

"No. I was up there, remember? They're blank."

Their voices were barely audible to each other in the noisy hold. All around them wood scraped against wood, and metal rattled and creaked as the twisting and heaving movements of the ship shifted even the stoutly lashed cargo. And every sound was multiplied by echoes.

Ken tried to tell himself that the noises were comforting-that utter

silence would make the hold even more eerie. But the argument wasn't convincing. He found himself trying to identify each echoing sound, to assure himself that none of them was the footfall of someone about to discover his and Sandy's presence.

Hastily he began to flash his light back and forth over the starboard sides of the big cases. At first he moved so quickly, and so erratically because of the ship's motion, that he missed the stenciled letters. Then he saw the first one, just as Sandy's light found it too, and they both moved toward it as quickly as the pitching ship would permit.

Ken reached for the paper and pencil in his pocket. Sandy tried to hold his beam steady on the black letters.

"From Elaine and Rogers," Sandy whispered, close to Ken's ear. "Address is twenty-two River Street, Kingsway, New York. Going to Judson Watkins, care of Elaine and Rogers, Avenida Carerro, Val-" He broke off. "No good."

"Right." Ken crossed off the few words he had scrawled. "Obviously legitimate," he said. "Probably the furniture of some employee being transferred to Valencia."

Sandy had moved his light so that it illuminated the names on the next crate. "That's no good either," he said. "It's from a company to a company, and we agreed that Gerard wouldn't do that."

A loud ominous crack farther down the row caused them to spin around, lights frantically exploring the darkness. One of the crisscrossed timbers that held the big pile of crates in place on the starboard third of the hold had snapped, broken off by the pressure of the weight behind it. The topmost two feet of the timber, split off from the rest of the long length of rough wood, now angled out over the aisle.

Ken eyed the crate behind the broken wood. It was held in place only by one other timber, which cut across the crate's upper right-hand corner.

Clutching at Sandy's arm, as the ship rolled heavily to port, Ken could visualize that crate plunging down if the second timber gave way.

"Let's get this job done fast-and get out of here," he muttered.

"Right." Sandy's one-word answer was husky with nervousness. He was already seeking out the third crate's lettering with his flashlight.

A moment later they were moving on again, the lettering uncopied because both sender and recipient were commercial organizations.

"My idea doesn't look so good," Sandy said.

"Maybe-"

He broke off as a violent shuddering shook the ship, and a thousand rattling and banging noises throughout the hold set up

thunderous waves of sound.

"What's that?" Ken gasped out the words.

"We're really heaving now!" Sandy said, as they steadied each other. "She's kicking up her heels high enough to lift the propeller out of water-and when a ship's this loaded, that takes a lot of heaving."

As he finished speaking, the ship rolled far to port, throwing them both hard against the pile of crates they were facing. But Ken was scarcely aware of pain. His head was ringing from the crashing noise overhead, caused by tons of water being flung over the side onto the steel deck above them.

"Maybe we'd better get out of here right now," Sandy said when the noise had subsided momentarily. He pulled himself upright by pushing against the pile of crates. "We don't seem to be making any headway."

Ken swallowed. His impulse was to answer, "Yes! Let's go." In this resounding cavern it was difficult to believe that the ship was not about to sink-and he could think of no more terrifying fate than to be caught in the hold if the ship started to go down. But his reason told him that freighters very seldom sank. And he and Sandy had risked so much they would never forgive themselves if they gave up now.

"We will-as soon as we're finished," he managed to say through clenched teeth. "Come on. Read off the names on this one." He lowered himself to one knee, braced against the crates, so that he could use the other knee as a support for his paper. After one fearful glance at the shattered brace, now directly above them, he turned his head away and kept his eyes on the paper. "Hurry up," he muttered.

Sandy had moved his light so that it illuminated the lettering on the next crate. He, too, braced himself against the wall of crates in an effort to keep the light steady. "To Randolph-"

"Louder!" Ken said, swiveling around to look up at Sandy. "I can't hear-"

And then Ken saw Sandy toppling toward his own crouched body. In the split second before Ken could react to what was happening he realized that something was wrong. The redhead was making no effort to keep himself upright by thrusting out his hands toward the crates. His arms seemed to hang limply by his sides. And as the flashlight in Sandy's hands fell to the floor, Ken saw that Sandy's knees were buckling.

"Sandy!" he yelled, thrusting himself upward in a twisting effort to grab the sagging body.

Just then something crashed against Ken's head. He had a dim glimpse of Sandy's flashlight rolling along the deck, and then everything went black.

CHAPTER VII

THE CAPTAIN'S ULTIMATUM

Ken fought for breath. He felt as if he were under water. He remembered vaguely that he and Sandy were on a ship, and it occurred to him that the ship must be going down-sinking slowly, fathom after fathom, toward the bottom of the sea.

Then, dimly, as if from a great distance, he heard a voice.

"Take it easy, boy," it said. "You're all right."

Amazement forced Ken's eyelids up a fraction of an inch. He shut them again instantly as a brilliant light thrust itself straight into his pupils. But he realized now that he was lying flat on his back, on some hard surface, and he pushed one hand down on that surface in an effort to raise himself.

Instantly a hand slipped under the back of his neck and he felt himself being lifted to a sitting position.

"You're all right now, Ken."

This time it was Sandy's voice, and Ken opened his eyes cautiously again to find himself staring into Sandy's scared face. The characteristic Allen red hair made a tousled halo in the beam of a light shining down on him from above.

"You all right, Ken?" Sandy asked.

"Are you?" Ken wanted to know.

"Sure. Except for a bump on my head and a couple of trip hammers working away inside it."

"Well, if that's being all right, I guess I'm all right too."

For a second they grinned faintly at each other in sheer relief. And then, in one flashing instant, Ken knew where they were and remembered what they had been doing when he saw Sandy toppling over, and felt that crash against his own skull.

When he lifted his head to look around, the movement set up a throb of pain that made him wince, but he ignored it and raised his head another inch until he could see Chief Officer Torkling and a pale-faced chief steward standing above him. The steward was holding a dripping towel and bending toward Ken with it.

Ken knew, then, why he had felt as if he were under water in the brief moments before he fully regained consciousness.

"Never mind. Thanks." He motioned the towel away. "I'm really all right now."

"In that case," Torkling said, his usual booming tone reduced to a low, reverberating rumble, "we'd better get you up on deck right away. Think you can manage the ladder?" His square, powerful body

swayed gently back and forth above Ken's head, with the motion of the heavily pitching ship.

"I guess so," Ken said slowly, looking around in an effort to clarify for himself exactly what had happened. The first thing that caught his eye was a partly shattered wooden crate, lying on the floor a yard or less away. "Was that-?" he began.

"That's right," Torkling told him briefly. "That's what hit you. Lucky thing you weren't killed."

"It hit you both," the chief steward said. "A miracle-a real miracle it is that you're both alive to tell the tale. And that Mr. Torkling here found you before something else came down on your heads."

"Though I'm afraid that the Old Man is in the mood to finish you off himself," Torkling said dryly. "So if you really can get up now, I think you'd better. The longer you put off seeing him, the less he'll like it-once he knows you're able to move."

"Of course if you had some very good excuse for being down here-" the chief steward began, obviously in an effort to encourage them.

"We thought it was a good excuse, but the captain may not agree with us," Sandy told him. "Come on, Ken. Let's face the music. It certainly was lucky you found us, Mr. Torkling," he added. "How'd it happen? Were you looking for us?"

"Looking for you?" Torkling seemed puzzled. "Of course not. In a blow like this we check the cargo pretty regularly, especially in a partially filled hold like this one. Shifting cargo is one of the worst dangers a freighter faces at sea. So I came down here as a matter of course. Found two of the jeeps banging their bumpers together like a couple of angry goats, and this case broken through the dunnage and shattered." He gestured upward to where two timbers had snapped, leaving a gaping hole through which the crate had obviously crashed. "And of course I found you too."

"It's my business," he went on, "to see that things are secure in the holds. And two unconscious passengers aren't included in my idea of security. The captain's going to ask you this question, of course, but I'm asking it too: What were you doing down here?" He pulled something out of his pocket and handed it to Sandy. "I assume it had something to do with this paper I found lying on the floor beside you," he added. "But just what was your purpose?"

Ken caught his breath. The blow he had received had knocked out of his head their reason for going down into the hold. Now, at the sight of the practically blank paper, he remembered. As he lifted his arm to look at his watch, he saw Sandy making the same movement.

"Ten o'clock!" Sandy exclaimed. "It may already be too late. But if Global can get the police on the job, maybe it can-"

Torkling broke into his swift, incoherent speech in a voice of authority that reminded the boys of his position as chief officer of the ship. "You haven't answered my question," he said. "You will do that now, please, and then you will report immediately to the captain."

"We wanted to get the names of the senders and receivers of these crates to have them checked for authenticity," Sandy explained, rattling off the words as fast as he could speak. "We know nobody agrees with us, but we still think Mr. Gerard may be alive and in hiding somewhere in this hold. So we—"

"That nonsense again!" Torkling interrupted him sharply. "All right, Steward." He glanced at the man who still stood by. "Take these two young men up to the captain. I don't know whether you realize"—he turned back to the boys—"what trouble you could have caused for this ship's crew and owners if you'd been seriously hurt down here. Probably you're too young and heedless to think of such things, but don't be surprised if the captain gives you a pretty hard time over this business. Go along with you now. I've got to stay here to get this broken crate out of the way and the dunnage back in shape."

"If we could just have a couple of more minutes down here," Sandy began, "and the chance to send a radiogram to New York—"

"If you're strong enough to get up that ladder, you're going out of here right now." Torkling's flat statement permitted no argument. "That's the captain's order. He made it clear he wanted to see you at the first possible moment."

The steward stepped quickly forward to help Sandy hoist Ken to his feet, and gave both boys a sympathetic glance. But they were looking at each other, their eyes meeting in acknowledgment of the fact that they could do nothing but obey the chief officer.

The ship gave another abrupt roll just then, and the sure-footed steward had to steady them both. The need to accept his aid added the final element to their sense of helplessness.

Neither of them spoke again as they made their way, weaving unevenly across the pitching deck, to the ladder.

Up on deck, with the aid of the steward's firm hand tugging them through the hatchway, they could realize clearly how much the weather had worsened that evening. Sheets of water now poured over the rail with every wave, to slosh inches deep around their ankles as it swirled toward the scuppers in streams as swift as spring torrents. By the time they were climbing a second ladder to their own deck, both boys were soaked from head to foot. But neither their drenched clothes, nor the throbbing pain in their heads, could distract their minds from the tongue-lashing they anticipated from the captain.

Clinging to the handrail of the stairs, staggering even as they walked along corridors, they reached the door of the captain's

quarters. The chief steward rapped on it briskly.

"Mr. Holt and Mr. Allen are here, sir," he said through the panel.

The captain himself opened the door, looked the boys up and down with a penetrating glance, and motioned them inside. He dismissed the steward, closed the door, and turned to face them.

"Are either of you badly hurt?" he asked quietly.

The gentleness of the question surprised them.

"We don't think so, sir," Ken told him "We've got bumps on the head, but--"

"Let's see them. Sit down over there-both of you." Captain Chisholm motioned toward the leather lounge.

"We're a little wet, sir," Sandy said tentatively.

"Don't bother about that." He gestured them firmly to the seat.

"There's no doctor aboard a freighter, you know, so I have to do my best to look after any ailments that crop up. Chief Officer Torkling's pretty good at that sort of thing," he added, "but he's busy right now with that crate that hit you. It was *a* crate, I understand?" he added, carefully washing his hands at the bowl just inside the door of his bathroom.

But before they could answer he was approaching them briskly. "Now! Show me where it hit you." He bent over Sandy first.

"There's a bump right-ouch!-right here on the back of my head."

"Yes, I see." With a surprisingly light touch the captain's fingers explored the swelling. "*Hmm*-you must have been bending over when it came down on you. Were you?"

"I don't exactly remember," Sandy admitted. He swallowed and then took the plunge. "You see, I was holding the flashlight while Ken was crouched down beside me, copying the names of the senders and receivers of some of those crates."

"So that's what you were doing down there." The voice was an unsurprised murmur.

"Yes, sir," Sandy said. "You see, we--"

"Never mind that now. Just let me look at you first." The careful fingers had parted Sandy's red hair and were touching the swelling again. "Seems to me you were pretty lucky, young man. The skin's not even broken.

"All right." He turned to Ken. "Now let me look at you."

"The swelling's here, right behind my ear," Ken told him. "About where Sandy's is."

"I see." The captain felt the spot, looked at it carefully, and then moved away from the boys to sit down in his own swivel chair. "No abrasion there either. You were both lucky-luckier than you deserve. Very well, then," he went on. "Since I don't want to keep you sitting around in those wet clothes longer than necessary, suppose you tell

me now, and as quickly as possible, exactly what you hoped to do with those names.” He picked up his pipe but he didn’t reach for his tobacco. He merely fingered the bowl thoughtfully, looking first at Ken, then at Sandy, and back at Ken again.

Ken opened his mouth to speak, but Sandy beat him to it.

“It was my idea,” he said. “And I know we had no right to go down there. But you see, we thought-” As tersely as he could, Sandy explained what they had hoped to accomplish by transmitting to Global in New York a list of senders’ and receivers’ names from the larger crates in the hold.

The captain listened without comment and without change of expression. His failure to show the anger the boys had expected made it easier to tell the story, but Sandy found himself speaking quickly with the idea of completing his account before an explosion.

The explosion never occurred.

“You know,” the captain said, on a meditative note, when Sandy had finished, “I can’t remember ever encountering greater determination in all my life. Or is it,” he added with a faint smile, “just plain pigheadedness?”

Ken spoke up. “Maybe it’s mostly that, sir. But you see-”

The smile had vanished and Captain Chisholm’s face looked suddenly stern. “What I see is that you endangered your lives, on my ship and against my regulations, seeking justification for an idea you persist in harboring, in spite of all evidence to the contrary.”

The formal words, as much as the stern expression, were a powerful rebuke.

Ken leaned forward quickly, and the movement sent a stab of pain through his head. “We know that, sir. And we’re sorry. Really sorry.”

” ‘Sorry!’” The single repeated word, its weakness emphasized by Captain Chisholm’s scornful tone, was like a slap in the face.

It required an effort for Ken to say, “But we’re still convinced that Mr. Gerard is alive and on this ship. So we-”

This time the captain did not let him finish. “Your convictions are your own concern,” he said firmly.

“Running this ship is mine. And preventing injuries to my passengers is part of my responsibility. You have put me in a position where, for your own safety, I should probably order you confined to your cabin. I can do that, you know.”

He waited.

“Yes, sir,” Ken said. “We know you can.”

“I don’t intend to humiliate you by issuing that order,” the captain went on. “But neither do I expect you to flout my authority in the future. Regulations on shipboard are made for the protection of life and property. They’re not just senseless rules dreamed up for no

purpose.”

“We know that, sir,” Sandy assured him.

“Very well. In the future, so long as you remain aboard this ship, I shall expect you to behave as if you knew it-and understood it as well. Tomorrow morning, when we dock at Valencia, you can take your story to the police there, or to the American consul who will meet the ship. What you say to such authorities is none of my business. Getting you safely to Valencia is. So until then I am requesting you-and you understand I could make that a stronger word if I chose-I am requesting you not to meddle any more in a situation that does not concern you.”

He got to his feet.

The boys, taking the movement as their dismissal, arose too.

“Now get out of those wet clothes,” the captain added. “I’ll take another look at those bumps in the morning. And since they’ll probably be painful for a while-I imagine you’re both in for pretty severe headaches-I’ll have something sent down to you that will ease the discomfort. Let’s hope that after a good night’s sleep you’ll be none the worse for your-” he paused, as if to select his phrase carefully-“for your extremely ill-advised adventure,” he concluded.

“Yes, sir,” Ken said.

Sandy repeated a meek, “Yes, sir. And thank you, sir.”

They met Torkling on the stairs to their deck.

“Well?” Torkling asked. “How goes it?”

It was difficult to know whether Torkling was inquiring about their physical condition or the captain’s degree of anger at their disobedience of ship regulations. And at that moment neither Ken nor Sandy was ready for another full-length discussion of their trip to the hold.

“Not too bad,” Ken told him, fingering his bump to make his own reference clear. “Luckier than we deserve, according to the captain.” In the hope of preventing any mention of the captain’s attitude toward their escapade, he added, “He said he’d send us down some headache pills, and that by morning we’d be all right.”

“Good.” Torkling seemed to have the answer he wanted. “You can take his word for it too. He’s a pretty good sawbones for a captain. He’ll send you something that’ll work, all right. You get a good night’s rest.” He stood aside to let them pass.

“Pretty decent of him not to give us another bawling out,” Sandy said as they made their cautious way to their own door. “I guess he had as much right to do it as the captain had-if those holds are more or less his responsibility. I suppose we ought to say,” he added bleakly, “that we’ve been lucky all around. But just the same ...” He didn’t finish the sentence. They were both aware that the failure of

their trip into the hold made them feel anything but fortunate.

In the privacy of their own cabin Sandy spoke again. "How do you feel-really? Are you going to be all right? I don't think my bump amounts to much, but it took you quite a while to come to, down there. You had me scared."

"Sure I'm going to be all right." Ken was feeling his bump again, but he was looking at Sandy. "Let me see yours," he demanded.

Sandy turned around and stooped slightly. "Right there-behind my ear."

"Funny," Ken murmured. "Mine's in the same place."

"I wouldn't call it exactly funny," Sandy muttered. "In fact, I could do without it entirely."

They were both pulling off their wet jackets as they spoke, and wet shoes and socks. Their shirts had been kept dry by the sturdy leather, but their slacks were soaked from the knees down. Absent-mindedly-instead of changing into pajamas, which the hour suggested-they both reached for dry slacks instead, and for the light sandals they normally wore in their room.

"That was a great hunch I had, really great," Sandy said scathingly. "In the first place it doesn't work. And in the second place it gets us both knocked out and stuck with bumps that feel as if they'll be the size of grapefruit in another hour or so. And now we're all but locked in our cabin by the captain-and we can't even blame him. From his point of view, he's certainly got the right to be mighty annoyed with us." He reached into the bathroom for a towel and buried his head in it, to rub gingerly at the wet hair around the bruise behind his ear.

"And we've got the right to be annoyed at somebody else."

"What? Didn't hear you. Dry your hair-it's dripping all over your shirt." Sandy tossed Ken a second towel. "You want to catch pneumonia?"

"No." Ken held the towel, staring into space. "And I don't like the idea of being made a fool of either."

"If you're sore because it was my hunch that sent us-"

"You know better," Ken interrupted him. "No, I'm sore at the mastermind who arranged our knockouts down there."

Sandy's jaw dropped. "Arranged them? What are you talking about?"

"Well," Ken told him, beginning to mop at his hair, "that was certainly no accident."

"You mean somebody pushed that crate on top of us?" Sandy looked incredulous. "But that's impossible! In the first place we saw the first timber crack off. And-"

"I don't think we were hit by the crate at all," Ken broke in.

"Not hit by the crate!" Sandy looked at his friend with honest

concern. "You must be in worse shape than we realized! Look, Ken-get into bed right away, will you? Maybe I ought to ask the captain to come down and take another look at you."

Ken, wincing as a corner of the towel flicked against the swelling back of his ear, managed a grin in spite of the pain. "I'd rather you'd take a look at some evidence," he said. "For example, we were both hit behind the right ear."

Sandy looked at Ken's head for a moment while he automatically felt his own. "That's right. But--"

"And the skin wasn't broken."

"That's right too."

"Well, the rough wooden edges of that crate would certainly have broken through the skin, I'd think," Ken said, "if the crate hit us hard enough to knock us out for a while."

"That's true. It is funny the skin wasn't broken."

"Exactly what I think. And the locations of the bumps are funny too," Ken went on. "What kind of a fall do you think that crate did? With only our bruises to go by, we have to assume it flew down and out off the pile, then curved back to catch you behind the ear-you were facing the pile, remember, and standing up, not bent over the way the captain thought you must have been. And after that the crate sort of bounced up in the air again, so that it could come down behind my right ear too. I don't know how that sounds to you," Ken said, "but, so far as I can see, there must be laws of motion and gravity operating on this ship that Isaac Newton never heard of."

"Hmm." Sandy was automatically rubbing back and forth at the mop of red hair above his brow. "You're right. The way you describe it, it certainly does sound funny."

"Besides," Ken went on, "I've been trying to remember the exact sequence of events in the couple of seconds before I was knocked out, and I think they're straight in my mind now. I saw you toppling forward before there was any sign of a crate falling. You must have been hit already-your arms were hanging limp. I had turned around toward you. And even if I'm wrong about you're having been hit already, I'd have seen the crate coming down on you-if that's what it was doing. I never saw the crate at all. Something hit me just as I saw your knees buckle and realized you were going down. So, even if we could still assume you'd been hit by a falling crate, where was the crate in that split second while I looked up at you-before I was hit myself? Had it flown back up again, before it started down on me?"

"You sure are right," Sandy said. "If things happened the way you remember, we couldn't both have been hit by the crate. But maybe," he added, "you're not remembering very accurately. After all, a blow on the head-" He stopped himself. "No. The positions of the two blows

are peculiar enough. No single falling object could have hit me behind the right ear and then swung out and come back to hit you behind *your* ear."

Ken nodded. "That's the way it looks to me. And since we didn't imagine the blows--"

"We certainly didn't!" Sandy agreed fervently.

"We've got to admit that they must have been caused by something else."

"For instance-what?" Sandy wanted to know. "Have you got that figured out too?"

"Near enough," Ken told him. "We were hit by something softer than a wooden crate-by something that didn't lacerate the skin, as a wooden edge probably would have done. A blackjack might have filled the bill. It must have come from above us-from the top of that row of big crates."

"And whose blackjack was it?" Half eagerly, half skeptically, Sandy awaited Ken's answer.

"I think it belonged either to Gerard himself or to his accomplice," Ken told him. "And I think the purpose of the knockouts was to prevent us from collecting all those names and sending them off to be checked before the boat docked."

CHAPTER VIII

BAD MEDICINE

Ken and Sandy, both still clutching towels, looked at each other for a long moment. A roll of the ship broke their locked glance, and Ken moved. Taking Sandy's towel and his own he lurched into the bathroom and slung them over a rack.

"You really think somebody did that to us on purpose?" Sandy's croaking voice followed him.

"It's just that I don't think any other explanation makes sense," Ken answered, reappearing.

Sandy braced himself against the bunk. "I agree with you now about the crate. I see it couldn't have hit both of us." Suddenly his face reddened with anger. "But that means we've really been put through the hoops! Gerard has shown us up as fools! He's had us slugged. And he's fixed it so that now-when your version of how we were hit proves we've been right all along-we're really stymied! Nobody would listen to us any more, or let us prow around down there, if we had the whole Supreme Court pleading our case!"

"The captain certainly won't listen to us," Ken agreed, lowering himself into a chair and bracing it into place by thrusting his feet against his bunk.

"Of course, not," Sandy said. "He's apparently got every reason in the world to think we're pigheaded fools. And Gerard must know that too-must know that we've been on his trail, and that now he's tied our hands. He must be sitting down there in his crate laughing like a hyena," he concluded savagely.

"I'm not so sure," Ken said slowly, after a moment. "Put yourself in Gerard's place for a minute. Do you think he feels absolutely secure now?"

"Why shouldn't he?" Sandy demanded. "He's certainly had everything his own way. All we've managed to do was break the monotony for him. He's probably glad we were around-or he might have got bored sitting down there all alone! Boy, no wonder those blows didn't crack our skulls. They're too thick to crack."

"But wouldn't it occur to Gerard that we might make a last stab at exposing him tomorrow morning when we dock?" Ken put the question aloud as it popped into his confused thoughts. "He knows we're connected with Global News. That name carries some weight-even if ours doesn't. So maybe," Ken went on, more hopefully, "he doesn't feel quite so secure right now as you think. If he did plan that knockout, maybe he thought it would put us out of commission until

he was safely off the ship. And if he knows different now-of course we can't be sure how much he could hear or find out, of what went on down there-perhaps he's still afraid we might mess up his scheme."

"I wish I could think he was really worried," Sandy said, "but I can't. Gerard's accomplice, whoever he is, must keep him pretty well informed about what goes on. So he probably knows how the captain feels about us now."

"But the captain isn't going to try to prevent us from handing our suspicions over to the police, or the customs officials or the American consul," Ken pointed out. "And there's still a chance, you know, that we may persuade somebody to take us seriously tomorrow morning, and to have all those crates opened and inspected right at the time they leave the ship, before Gerard could get out of his hideaway and escape."

"A mightily slim chance," Sandy muttered. "If we tell our story to some official, and he mentions it to the captain, the captain probably will tell him to forget it-that we've been driving him crazy with the same tale, and that he's already proved there is absolutely no basis for our suspicions."

"Somehow it's hard to think of the captain taking that attitude," Ken muttered.

"Sure it is," Sandy said. "And you know why? Because he looks and acts sort of like Pop, that's why. So we instinctively think he must be a nice smart guy, like Pop."

Ken grinned faintly. "You may be right. He did remind me of Pop. I couldn't help liking him even when he was bawling us out, and I suppose that could be the reason."

"I bet it is," Sandy said. "But we don't really have any reason to think he's like Pop at all. And personally I'm prepared to have him pooh-pooh any story we try to tell to an official tomorrow morning in Valencia. After all, he's already pooh-poohed it to our faces. It stands to reason he'd do the same in front of police or government authorities."

"Yes, I suppose you're right," Ken said reluctantly. He put a cautious hand to the growing lump behind his ear. It throbbed more painfully at every moment, and Ken had the feeling that it was impossible to think clearly with that pulsing ache beating inside his skull.

"Yours too?" Sandy murmured. "My whole head feels as if it were going to explode any minute."

"It's only me-Angelo." The words and a light knock on the door were simultaneous, and the young dining-room steward came unbidden into their room, extending a saucer holding four small white pellets. "For the headaches, the captain said," Angelo explained,

grinning sympathetically. "I hear they're pretty bad-no?"

"They are pretty bad-yes," Sandy told him, "They are worse than that."

Angelo poured water out of the carafe into the glasses bracketed to the wall on either side of the jug, and handed one to each of the boys. Then he offered them the pills. "Two for each, captain's orders," Angelo explained. "The captain said some people hated to take pills, and he said in case you were like that, I should use force." He grinned. "The Old Man was joking, of course. He just meant it would be good for you to take these."

Sandy had already downed a swallow of water and was reaching for the pills. "Don't worry. We'll take them all right. I'd swallow anything if I thought it would put an end to this hammer-and-tong performance inside my head."

"The captain's prescription is certainly welcome. We really need a painkiller tonight," Ken added, gulping down one white pellet and then the other. "Thank him for sending them, will you, Angelo?"

"Sure-if I get a chance to see him," Angelo replied. "But he's mighty busy tonight-like most of the officers, it seems."

Ken jerked around quickly to look at him, and paid for it with an unusually violent thrust of pain. He held his head rigid then, and spoke carefully. "Why, Angelo? What's up?"

"Oh, nothing serious," Angelo assured him, and Ken felt his suddenly rising spirits sinking again. "Just this little Mediterranean storm. I guess you've noticed it's been sort of rough."

"Yes," Sandy said dryly. "We noticed."

"It's no worse than it often is in these waters," Angelo went on. "But when the captain sent a message to Valencia a while ago, asking for the pilot to meet us outside the harbor at two bells-at five a.m., that is-he got word back that the pilot couldn't come aboard until things got a little quieter. So now we're slowing down, and the latest word is we won't be going into Valencia until eight bells-eight o'clock-at the very earliest. And maybe later, depending on the weather. When a ship has to change her schedule like this, it keeps everybody on the jump."

"You too, I see," Ken said.

"The chef and I were put on extra duty tonight when it looked like we were docking early and the crew would all be out on deck readying the booms, and needing food," the dining-room steward explained. "I guess breakfast won't be any earlier than usual, now. But it's just as well I'm around. The captain's staying up, the way he usually does when we're docking, and he likes coffee regularly. So I'm just starting a new urn. Better go look after that right now," he added. "Hope the pills work," he told them from the door. And then he was

gone.

“He doesn’t hope it as much as I do,” Sandy murmured, cradling his head in his hands.

Now that Angelo had called it to his attention, Ken was aware that the ship had lost some of her forward speed. Moving more slowly through the water, she also seemed steadier. But the pitch and roll of the waves was still all too apparent.

Deliberately, in an effort to forget the problem that had plagued Sandy and himself for so many hours, Ken tried to think how it would feel to be walking the solid land of Valencia’s streets the next morning.

He gave up almost immediately. He knew only too well how it would feel. The conviction that Gerard was somewhere on land too would be with Sandy and himself wherever they went, taunting them with their failure to expose a brilliant criminal and his accomplice.

“You know,” Ken said suddenly, “there’s one aspect of this business that we really never have put our minds to.”

“What minds?” Sandy muttered.

“We haven’t really given much thought,” Ken went on, refusing to let Sandy sidetrack him, “to the mystery of Gerard’s accomplice. Who is he?”

Sandy answered slowly, “That’s true. We talked a couple of times about Green being the most likely suspect, because he could have tossed that dummy over from the flying bridge. And earlier tonight I was thinking it was suspicious that Green was so quick to explain away that fresh grease on the hatch-cover hinges.”

“But somebody else could have pulled the dummy over from below,” Ken pointed out. “And Green’s remark about the grease could have been perfectly innocent.”

“True,” Sandy admitted. “Absolutely true. Then who-?”

They both stared into space for several moments, trying to marshal the ship’s officers in order in their minds, and re-examine the behavior of each one with the thought that he might have accepted a bribe to assist Gerard.

Ken jerked his head up. He had almost drifted off into a doze.

“Hey!” His voice sounded thick. He eased his feet down from the corner of the bunk, where he had kept them braced, and got laboriously erect. “I’m falling asleep!”

“Me too,” Sandy muttered. “Good idea-sleep.” His head fell forward heavily. His eyes were closed.

Ken’s eyelids were closing again too. “But we have to-” What was it they had to do? He found he couldn’t remember.

And he didn’t care. Sandy was right. Sleep was a good idea.

Ken stumbled toward his bunk. They didn’t have to be at the

Advance office early in the morning. Mom would let them stay in bed late.

But that wasn't right, Ken told himself fuzzily. They weren't in Brentwood. They were-Yes, of course, they were on a ship. He was proud of himself for having remembered. On a ship, that's where they were. Captain Chisholm's ship. But the captain would let them sleep late too. He'd look after them-he'd already sent them those nice pills.

Ken sat on the edge of his bunk, with some vague idea that if he lowered himself to his pillow the move would set up new waves of pain in his head.

Funny, he thought. Head still hurts. Captain's pills didn't cure headache-just made you feel *fuzzy*, as if your head were full of cotton wool. And sleepy. Very sleepy.

Not fair, really. Captain had said he'd send them headache pills. But what was the difference, Ken wondered, telling himself that he was trying to be fair. If pills put you to sleep, then you wouldn't feel the headache. So if the captain had made a mistake and sent them sleeping pills instead-After all, everybody makes mistakes. And sleeping pills were-

Sleeping pills!

Ken felt as if the two words had sounded a loud gong inside his head-a gong that dissolved the cotton wool in one corner of his brain and left it clear and lucid.

They'd taken sleeping pills and now they were going to sleep. And that was wrong. They shouldn't go to sleep now. There was something they had to do. And they couldn't do it if they were asleep. Maybe that's why they'd been given sleeping pills, so that they couldn't do it, whatever it was. Ken couldn't remember clearly, but he was sure it was something important.

Something so important that they must stay awake.

"Sandy!" He meant the word to be loud and sharp. It came out slurred, almost inaudible.

With a great effort, eyes almost closed, Ken got off the bunk and moved toward the chair where Sandy slumped. "Sandy!" he said again, putting his hand on the redhead's shoulder.

Sandy didn't stir. His lack of response angered Ken, and the anger made him think a little more clearly. "Sleeping pills," he said. "We took sleeping pills!" He gave the shoulder under his hand a vigorous shake.

"G'way," Sandy mumbled.

"Get up!" Ken said. "They did this to us-on purpose. It's a trick. Get up!"

A roll of the ship gave its own command just then. Sandy was pitched halfway out of the chair, and Ken, clinging to him, fell

forward with him.

Ken caught at the end of Sandy's bunk and managed, somehow, to push the upper part of Sandy's body across it.

When the *Helen Rogers* righted herself again, Ken bent over the prone figure, trying to think what to do. More than anything in the world he too wanted to go to sleep, but he was foggily determined not to do so. And he was just as determined that Sandy too must wake up.

Somewhere, far in the back of his mind, he seemed to know that you could fight off the effects of sleeping tablets if you kept moving. He had risen from his bunk and moved over here beside Sandy. He was going to be all right if he didn't let himself lie down.

But Sandy was already asleep. Could he be wakened? And if Ken could rouse him, would he stay awake? Yes, Ken answered himself. That was another thing he knew about sleeping tablets-wasn't it? They put you to sleep but their influence wasn't long-lasting. If you were roused again, their effect was lost.

"Sandy!" Ken said.

Still the redhead remained motionless.

Vaguely Ken recalled instructions learned in first-aid courses: walk the patient up and down the room.

He shook his head. That was impossible. The cabin wasn't large enough, even if he could get Sandy to his feet.

But there must be *something* he could do.

Yes, there was.

Ken straddled Sandy's legs, hanging over the edge of the bunk, and leaned forward until he could grasp Sandy's arms at the elbow. Bracing his feet he lifted the arms and then lowered them. Lifted them again and brought them down. Lifted them again-

Over and over, finding each motion a desperate effort, Ken kept on. But even as he tired, his brain grew a little less vague.

"This isn't good enough," he said finally, half aloud. "Have to think of something better."

Water? Would it do any good to pour cold water over Sandy?

Ken disentangled himself from Sandy's legs, stumbled to the water carafe, stumbled back again and tipped the jug over Sandy's head. Nothing emerged.

Ken stared curiously at the jug for a moment before he realized he had failed to remove the stopper.

There! With the stopper in one hand, he tipped the jug forward again. Water cascaded onto Sandy's red hair and Sandy's head moved in a convulsive jerk.

"Sandy! Wake up!" Ken let the jug fall onto the bunk and reached for Sandy to shake him. "Wake up!"

"Pretty soon," Sandy mumbled. "Just resting."

Ken stared down at him despairingly. If he only had some hot coffee.

But there was coffee-in the pantry!

"Sandy!" Ken began to tug at the arms he had been pumping up and down. "Get up! We'll go have some coffee. It's only a little way to the pantry. Try to get up!"

Sandy had heard him-the words had penetrated slightly into his fogged consciousness. His head moved slightly as he tried to shake it. "Not hungry-now," he said.

"Please!" Ken pleaded. "It's important. Try!"

He grabbed one of Sandy's arms, pulled him over onto his back. Then, taking both arms again, he hauled him to a sitting position.

"Sandy!" With the palm of his hand he struck Sandy's cheek-once, twice, three times.

A frown of annoyance creased Sandy's forehead. "Don't do that," he mumbled, and half opened his eyes.

"Then come! Sandy, you've got to! I'll help you."

Ken backed away from the bunk, tugging at Sandy as he moved, and the redhead was hauled to his feet. He staggered. Ken steadied him.

"That's right. Now walk. Here-this way."

Ken guided him around the corner of the bunk toward the door. Sandy moved beside him heavily, slowly, like an automaton.

Ken opened the door.

The dining room was silent and empty, with only two small night lights burning in opposite corners. It had never seemed so large before, and to Ken's eyes the pantry entrance appeared miles away.

He started toward it, keeping Sandy between himself and the wall, expecting Sandy to drop at his feet with every step. But the big sleep-dazed figure remained erect, stumbling along under Ken's guidance.

At last they were in the narrow room that Angelo always kept neat and shining. There was a bright light there, and the place was noisy with the rattle of serving pans clunking against the sides of the metal wells into which they were set.

Ken propped Sandy against the refrigerator, reached unsteadily toward the boxlike shelf where the cups were kept, and held one of them under the spigot of the coffee urn. When he turned the handle, hot black coffee poured out.

Ken let only a few swallows of it spurt into the cup, turned off the spigot, and pressed the partially filled cup against Sandy's lips. "Drink this, Sandy."

Eyes still closed, Sandy obediently opened his mouth. The hot liquid made him jerk away, and some of the coffee sloshed out. But his eyes had blinked half open as he jerked, and when Ken held the

cup to his lips again, Sandy automatically put up a hand to steady it.

Ken felt weak with relief and exhaustion. Sandy was coming around!

"Here! Have some more!" Hastily he ran more coffee into the cup and forced more of the black brew down Sandy's throat.

Two minutes later Sandy was turning away, muttering, "Whew! Enough! What're you trying to do-drown me?" And he looked at Ken with eyes that were wide open though still glassy.

Ken grinned feebly, and finished the coffee left in the cup himself.

"No, I'm not trying to drown you," he said. "But somebody's trying to put us out with sleeping tablets, so that we won't be around when the ship docks in Valencia tomorrow. And I figured we shouldn't let them get away with it. You'd better have another cup."

Sandy took it without argument. He was staring at Ken. "Sleeping tablets? What is all this?"

Ken told him again, and kept talking as Sandy drank. The glassy look began to leave Sandy's eyes.

"I thought at first it must be a mistake-that we were given sleeping tablets instead of headache pills by accident," Ken said.

Sandy shook his head. "Not Captain Chisholm," he said, his voice still thick. "Doesn't make mistakes-not the captain."

"That's what I think. Now." Ken took another swallow of coffee. As he had been talking a staggering idea had come to him. And now he waited, tensely, to see whether the same idea would occur to Sandy too.

"But then-" Sandy blinked. "But they *were* sleeping tablets. That's plain enough. You say you started to go out too-and fast-just as I did."

Ken nodded. "They were sleeping tablets, all right. And the captain sent them to us."

"But why would *he* want us to be out of the way when the ship docks tomorrow morning? Unless-" Sandy stopped, took another slow swallow of the black brew in his cup, and looked at Ken as intently as Ken was looking at him. Now Sandy's eyes were clear, and his voice was no longer thick as he said slowly, "But it couldn't be. The captain couldn't be Gerard's confederate. Not the captain!"

"Why not?" Instinctively Ken was speaking in a whisper, barely audible above the constant rumble of small banging sounds in the pantry. "Why couldn't he be? Because he reminds us of Pop?"

Sandy rubbed a hand across his face, as if trying to rid himself of the cobwebs still clouding his brain. "But he's the *captain*" he whispered protestingly. "He's responsible for the whole ship. He wouldn't-"

Ken broke in. "I know. It's hard to accept the idea. But don't forget that Gerard had a responsible job too. People trusted him, and look

how he treated that trust.” Fen spoke firmly, yet for all his firmness he realized that the very thought was as distasteful to him as it was to Sandy. But he knew an idea could not be dismissed simply because it was unpleasant. He and Sandy would have to examine this one carefully and with clearer heads than they had at the moment. He pushed himself away from the counter to test his ability to stand upright. “Let’s go out on that little aft balcony-the little deck out there-and get some air,” he said. “Might help us see things a little better.”

They rinsed out their cups and put them on the drainboard. At the pantry door, before turning into the corridor leading aft, Ken paused a moment, remembering the captain’s order. Had Captain Chisholm meant that they must remain in their cabin? Then Ken grinned wryly. It proved, he thought, how fuzzy his mind still was, if he could worry about disobeying the captain and mentally accuse him of being a criminal, all in the same moment.

“We really do need air,” he muttered, and led their swaying progress down the silent corridor to the door at its end. When he pushed it open, cold spray-wet wind struck them, but they both stepped out onto the narrow balcony overlooking the aft deck and stood there side by side, blinking in the darkness.

“Now,” Ken thought to himself, “we can begin to see if this makes any sense.” And he tried to pull his thoughts into order.

“One thing,” he said, his voice close to Sandy’s ear, “is that the captain could go anywhere on the ship without being questioned. That would be a help in a-“

He stopped. A creaking below him, under their feet, had caught his attention. He knew it was the sound of the door opening from the crew’s quarters onto the aft deck just beneath where they stood. And if somebody was coming out on the aft deck, Ken hoped he and Sandy wouldn’t be noticed. It was too late to slip back into the corridor, but he squeezed Sandy’s arm for silence.

A dark shape became vaguely visible in the gloom below them.

Ken gasped. The captain? In the darkness it was hard to distinguish one figure from another, but this one appeared stocky, not too tall. It could very well be the man he and Sandy had been discussing. And though it was true, Ken told himself, that the captain could go anywhere on shipboard without being questioned by his men, it was also true that it was unusual for the captain to go out on the aft cargo deck in the middle of the night.

Suddenly a possible explanation for such a move sprang into Ken’s mind. If the captain really was Gerard’s accomplice, it was natural that he would be going below into the hold now, to inform Gerard of the delay necessitated by the bad weather.

Under the roar of the wind and the pounding sea, Ken risked a whisper. "Could he be going below to tell Gerard-?"

Sandy grabbed his arm. "Right!" he breathed. "Stay here and watch him. I'll get my camera. This time we'll have some real evidence!"

The next moment Sandy was gone, easing the door open behind him and slipping through it into the corridor.

CHAPTER IX

A HANDFUL OF CLOTH

Left alone on the small balconylike structure overlooking the aft deck, clinging to the railing for support against the pitching of the ship, Ken's eyes strained forward and his heart thudded in his chest.

He refused to let himself think what would happen next, if he and Sandy actually caught the captain in the act of communicating with Gerard in the man's still-undetected hiding place. The captain's reaction, especially if he realized Sandy had recorded the incident with the flash camera Ken knew he was now hastily collecting in their room, was something Ken couldn't imagine, didn't dare let himself dwell on.

Determinedly he tried to concentrate on watching the deck below him. The shadowy figure was moving steadily across it, barely visible as it made its way toward the stern. It passed the big loading hatch of hold No. 4 and disappeared around the corner of the small winch-control house. There could be little doubt about it. The man, whoever he was, was heading for hold No. 5. In his mind's eye Ken could see him already bending low over the round cover of the inspection hatch.

Suddenly Sandy was beside Ken again, arm crooked protectively over the leather jacket he now wore. Inside the jacket a bulge told where he was sheltering his camera from the wind-blown spray and the water that still cascaded periodically over the rail.

"Here." Sandy thrust a second jacket at Ken, and only in that moment did Ken realize that he was shivering in his light shirt and sandaled feet. To have come out onto the deck so inadequately dressed for severe weather was, he knew, only another indication of the effects of the pills the captain had sent them. Thankful that the inside of his jacket, at least, was fairly dry, Ken slipped into it and buttoned it to keep it from flapping in the wind. But it didn't stop his shivering.

"O.K.?" Sandy breathed.

Ken nodded, clenching his teeth in an effort to keep them from chattering. "He disappeared-toward Number 5."

"Let's go."

A narrow metal stairway leading to the deck below was only a few feet to their left. They started down it, Ken in the lead, his shaking fingers clutching at the cold metal rail.

Water was still sloshing over the deck when they set foot on it. Their feet were wet instantly, and the leather soles of their sandals skidded on the surface that tilted precariously beneath them. It was

impossible to move quickly and still keep erect, and yet they both had a sense of frantic urgency-of the desperate need to reach the hatch cover of hold No. 5 within the next few seconds. Otherwise the man who had presumably just entered through it might complete his purpose and come up on deck again, where his presence could in no way be considered suspicious or conclusive.

Just as they reached the winch-control house the ship shuddered violently. Again a huge wave had lifted the stern so far out of the water that the propeller, half-exposed, thrashed wildly in mid-air. The boys had to cling to one of the aft winches until the stern dropped sickeningly into the following trough, and the shuddering subsided.

“Come on,” Ken gasped.

They made the last stretch in one long staggering dash, grabbing at each other, bent low to escape the fiercest force of the wet wind.

Ken stubbed his toe on the hatch cover when he reached it, and went down, striking one knee painfully on the edge of the heavy metal disk raised slightly above the level of the deck. But by the time Sandy had crouched beside him, hand thrust inside his jacket for his camera, Ken had gained his balance. He moved a few inches, sliding on his knees through swirling water, to bring himself into position just opposite the hatch-cover hinges.

Sandy was whispering swiftly in his ear. “Open it up easy. I’ll be ready to poke my head in, and the camera, and get a quick shot.”

Ken nodded, forgetting that the gesture probably would be invisible in the darkness, and reached for the locking levers.

They were already open.

It was true then! Somebody had entered the hold just before they reached it, and had left the hatch unlocked because he meant to return up the ladder to the deck very shortly.

But there was no triumph for Ken in that moment. There was only the cold knowledge that they must go ahead now with what they had planned, although the results, for them, might be very unpleasant indeed.

Grimly Ken clamped his fingers around the hatch cover and tugged. The metal disk was so heavy that for a moment he thought his icy, shaking hands could not lift it at all.

He pulled harder.

And suddenly the cover, as if by some magic, seemed to grow lighter-seemed to float upward toward Ken’s face.

For a tiny splinter of time Ken found himself thinking that the plunging of the *Helen Rogers* in the rough sea had caused the phenomenon; that the ship had dropped away from the cover, leaving it behind in the air, as a descending elevator drops away from the roof of a building.

But in the next instant, before he fully understood the weakness of that reasoning, he knew the truth in a blinding flash.

The hatch cover was being lifted up from below. Someone just beneath him was pushing the metal disk upward at the same time that Ken himself was pulling it.

Ken's mind commanded himself to let go-to get back out of the way of the unseen figure separated from him now only by the rapidly rising cover.

But his reactions were slow. His icy hands refused to loosen their grip of the cover instantly.

And as the cover came upright and started backward toward the deck, Ken was pulled along with it.

He did let go, then. But it was too late. Jerked off balance, bent forward over the gaping hole beneath him, he felt himself falling toward it. His hands went wide, clutching at empty air. For an instant one of them brushed against cloth-against Sandy's arm or Sandy's knee-and then Ken was tumbling down into the dark, headfirst, helpless to stop his somersaulting progress toward the blurred shape he could barely sense in the utter darkness below.

Almost instantly he struck against it. And the cry torn out of Ken's throat, as he plunged downward, was echoed by a lower, hoarser shout.

The figure against which he had collided had given way beneath him, and they were falling together, scraping against the ladder as they plummeted downward in a tangle of arms and legs.

Ken landed half on, half under, the other man, his face ground into a splintered board by the heavy arm flung over it and pinning it to the deck.

The breath was knocked out of his body. But with a violent effort Ken wrenched his head free, only half conscious of the sliver of wood tearing his cheek as he moved.

He found himself looking upward at a blinding light that dropped as he watched it.

"Ken!" Sandy was bellowing. Leaving his camera behind him on the deck, and grabbing for the flashlight in his pocket, Sandy had reached for the first rung of the ladder a startled second after he felt Ken fall away through the gaping hole.

But Sandy had leaped the rest of the way down, in a single drop, the light coming on beneath his fingers as he fell. He landed on one knee and one hand, the beam of his flash cutting a wild arc through the air as he flung his arm wide to gain his balance. Then he straightened up, balling his free hand into a huge fist as he rose.

"Ken!" he gasped again.

Ken was struggling up. The other figure was spread-eagled,

beneath him—a figure in a heavy dark jacket over creased khaki slacks. As Ken pulled clear of it, Sandy's light illuminated the face above the jacket.

“Mr. Torkling!”

Sandy spoke the name, the amazement in his tone no greater than what Ken was feeling.

But along with the amazement Ken also felt an enormous sense of relief. To be presented with evidence that Captain Chisholm was not, after all, the man who had aided Gerard in a ruthless fraud was like being relieved of a heavy burden.

“Why didn't we ever think of it's being Torkling instead?” Ken wondered vaguely.

“Give me a hand!” Torkling barked, rolling onto one side.

Ken reached toward him, feeling almost grateful to Torkling because he was himself, and not the captain. Ken could see why Sandy and he had made the mistake, however. Torkling was square where the captain was round, but the two men were much the same height and both walked with the slightly rolling gait of the lifelong seaman.

“You blundering, blithering idiots!” Torkling growled, getting to his feet with Ken's help while Sandy held the light on him.

Ken stared. Torkling's voice revealed no suggestion that he knew he had been caught in a compromising situation.

Stepping back from the stocky frame, Ken rubbed a hand across his cheek but didn't notice the blood that came off on it. Through his exhaustion, through the pains that stabbed at him in half a dozen places, he felt somehow that he must speak, must clear up for good the problem that had plagued Sandy and himself so stubbornly, and to which it seemed they must at last have found the solution.

“We followed you here, Mr. Torkling,” he said. “We know why you came down to the hold tonight. And—”

“Why shouldn't you know?” Torkling snapped. His eyes were narrowed to angry slits, his powerful hands brushed furiously at his clothes. “I told you myself I check on the cargo regularly during a blow. But who in the blazes gave you the right to come after me? Tell me that! Thought the Old Man had finally given you the kind of talking-to you've been needing. Didn't he? Or can't you understand plain English?”

Ken blinked at him. The barrage of questions, the outspoken outrage of the man, had left him speechless.

Had he and Sandy made one more mistake?

Of course it was true that Torkling had told them that he often came into the hold. In fact, his earlier visit had resulted in the rescue of Sandy and himself when they were both unconscious. But had that been a true rescue? A moment earlier Ken would have been willing to

swear that it was Torkling who had knocked them out, because they were getting too close to the secret he shared with Gerard. Ken had been convinced, then, that Torkling had merely pretended to discover their unconscious bodies at a moment that suited his purpose.

But now Ken couldn't be sure.

Torkling was the first mate, the chief officer of the ship. Like the captain he had the right-if not the duty-to go everywhere and anywhere aboard the *Helen Rogers*.

So was it true that he was, at this moment, down in the hold on legitimate business?

"We're sorry, Mr. Torkling," Sandy said.

"Sorry! That's a feeble word! You might have killed me-or been killed yourselves. In which case," the officer said grimly, "I probably would have lost my job for life. I'd have been blamed-do you understand?-just because you two idiotic kids insist on sticking your noses into places where you don't belong! You followed me!" He glared at them, his voice making a clumsy mockery of the statement Ken had found so difficult to make. "Don't you have any sense at all?"

"It doesn't look like it, sir." It was Sandy who answered him, in an apologetic mumble. And now the flashlight wavered in his hand.

Again Ken put his hand to his cheek, and this time he was aware of the sticky wetness there. He reminded himself that Sandy hadn't crashed headfirst into the hold, that Sandy's head probably was clearer at the moment than his own. And if Sandy thought they should apologize-

"It certainly doesn't look like it!" But Torkling's tone was slightly mollified now. "I told the Old Man he ought to lock you in your cabin, but no, he says he's got sons of his own and he can see you mean well, that you just don't have much judgment." Torkling laughed shortly. "Well, I don't have sons, but I've seen plenty of youngsters your age, and in my opinion most of them are too cocky for their own good. You two, for example, need to be taken down a peg or two."

"You've taken us, sir," Sandy assured him. "You see, we thought-"

"Spare me what you thought!" Torkling interrupted. "I've had enough of your nonsense by now. And take that light out of my eyes!"

"Sorry." Sandy swung the light around and down.

"Are the hold lights out of order?" Ken scarcely knew he was going to ask the question until the words were out. But the thought had suddenly struck him that on previous occasions, when an officer visited the hold officially-at least, on those occasions when Sandy and himself had accompanied Torkling and Green into this big cargo chamber-the lights had been snapped on earlier from the big electric panel in the corridor on the cabin deck.

"Out of order?" Torkling swung around on Ken abruptly, and the

anger that had been apparently dying down flared up again. "Can't you two do anything but ask ridiculous questions? Of course they're not out of order. But why do I need lights when I know this place like the back of my hand-and carry a flashlight with me, anyway?"

As he spoke he whipped a big flash out of his pocket, turned it on and lashed Ken with the beam, as if he were flicking Ken's bleeding face with a challenging gauntlet.

The anger-the gesture-none of it rang true. Ken knew that. He realized that he still wasn't thinking logically. But nevertheless he felt certain nobody would come down into the hold to check the cargo without giving himself the benefit of all the light available. For one thing, if any dunnage had loosened, and had to be refastened, he would need both hands for the job. He wouldn't want one of them to be burdened with a flashlight.

Furthermore-the new question jumped suddenly into Ken's mind, strengthening his previous doubt-if Torkling was in the habit of using a flashlight down here, why hadn't he turned it on when he was making his way up through the hatchway?

"I guess you want us to get out of here-and fast," Sandy was saying.

"I guess for once you're right. The sooner the better." The genial grin that accompanied Torkling's words was unexpected.

The pain in Ken's cheek was throbbing at one tempo now, the bruise behind his ear at another. But through the two conflicting pains a small curiosity fluttered. Why, he wondered, had Torkling sounded almost cheerful when he spoke those last words? Was he so pleased at the thought of the boys leaving the hold immediately? Was there something he didn't want them to see-something so significant that he would even pretend good nature toward them, if he thought it would make them leave more rapidly?

"Are you coming too, Mr. Torkhng?" Sandy swung his light as he spoke, automatically gesturing toward the hatch ladder.

And in the split second during which the light flashed over one of the four big crates lashed to the floor in the center of the hold, Ken saw something.

He felt his heart stop beating for a breathless moment.

Did he dare ask Sandy to flash his light back on that crate again? And without another glance could he be sure what he had seen?

Or didn't it matter? He knew he had seen something protruding through the joint near the lower corner of that crate. He thought it was a piece of cloth-the edge of a jacket, perhaps. But the important thing, he told himself, was that there was *something* poking through the slit where the long plywood front of the crate met the shorter plywood side. And whatever the object was, it had not been there a

few hours earlier when the boys had searched the hold with the second mate.

That's why Torkling was in such a hurry to get them out of the hold. He didn't want them to see what Ken had already seen, because he knew it was positive proof that Gerard was still alive and hiding in hold No. 5.

Gerard was inside that crate!

For a moment Ken thought he had shouted the words aloud.

But then he heard Torkling say, still in his newly genial manner, "Certainly I'm coming. I was on my way out of here a few minutes ago, if you remember. Maybe I'll make it this time. And when we get topside I think you'd better take those tablets the captain sent down to you. If you'd taken them earlier you'd be safely asleep now-and I wouldn't have to be wondering whether or not to report this last escapade of yours to the Old Man. Come along-after you." He gestured toward the hatchway ladder.

"We took those tablets, Mr. Torkling." Ken's voice cracked as he spoke, but he got the words out.

"Eh? You-?" Torkling looked startled, but he recovered quickly. "You did, eh? Well, guess it takes more than a couple of aspirin to quiet you two down then. Maybe you'd like a few more-would you?"

"I'd just like to take a look at this crate over here, before we leave," Ken said.

Now he was completely sure. Torkling's surprise had told him all too clearly that the chief officer had been responsible for those sleeping tablets-that he had somehow exchanged them for the headache pills the captain had given to Angelo for the boys.

Ken was moving as he spoke, moving toward the big crate from the corner of which protruded-yes, he could recognize it now for what it was-a handful of dark cloth.

"Get away from there!" Torkling barked. "No more of your nonsense, now! Back to your quarters!" It was not the voice he used when he was commanding the crew on deck. There was command in his tone, but there was something else too.

To Ken's suddenly sharpened senses it sounded like pure panic.

"We'd better be going, Ken," Sandy was saying. He hadn't yet glanced at that telltale corner of the crate. He didn't know what Ken had seen.

"I'm coming," Ken told him. "I just thought"- he got the last words out in a rush-"we could all go up together. Come on, Mr. Gerard! You might as well come out of there now!"

CHAPTER X

DEADLY CARGO

But fast as Ken spoke, Torkling moved faster. He leaped toward Ken, arms outstretched.

Ken, lunging toward that scrap of cloth, knew Torkling would reach him before he could close his hand around it.

Then Sandy roused himself from the moment of stupefied silence with which he had reacted to Ken's words.

His powerful left hand reached out, clamped itself around Torkling's shoulder, jerked the man backward and downward in a single motion. For the second time in a few minutes the chief officer sprawled spread-eagled on the floor, arms flailing helplessly.

But this time neither Ken nor Sandy was looking at him. Sandy's light had fastened on the crate, and they were both watching, wide-eyed, the movement of the front panel.

They had assured themselves that the iron bands that bound the crate, and the heavy ropes that lashed it to the floor, would prevent its walls from swinging outward-even if the dozens of screws at the joints could somehow be manipulated from within.

But the wall wasn't swinging outward. The whole lower half of it, apparently attached to the upper half by concealed hinges set behind the one-by-three center brace, was swinging inward-simply disappearing into the interior of the crate.

Even in that breathless moment Ken felt a flash of admiration for the ingenious mind that had designed the hiding place-that had worked out a device which was in no way hampered by the iron bands and ropes around the big wooden box.

And then Gerard himself appeared. He was on his hands and knees, crawling out onto the floor of the hold.

Ken and Sandy instinctively moved forward, to seize the man's two arms. Torkling, just behind them, was temporarily forgotten.

It was not Torkling who stopped them in then-tracks, hands still outstretched toward the man they had been stubbornly seeking since his apparent suicide.

What stopped them was the gun in Gerard's hand -a small weapon whose stubby barrel was fitted with what Ken knew must be a silencer. In the light of Sandy's flash the man's brown tweed suit looked wrinkled and disheveled, his face was dark and unshaven. But the hand that held the gun was perfectly steady, and as Gerard rose deliberately to his feet he was smiling slightly, as if he knew he was in complete command of the situation.

He glanced briefly at Torkling, now struggling to his feet. Then he fastened his steady gaze on the boys.

"What was that you were saying-about all of us going up together?" he asked. "Never mind. The suggestion doesn't appeal to me in the least. I'd much prefer that we all stay down here-together."

The boys backed instinctively away from the gun which glinted menacingly in the light Sandy kept waveringly focused on Gerard.

Too late they saw that this move had put Gerard between themselves and the hatch ladder. As he stepped away from the crate, toward them, he was almost at the foot of the ladder, and the boys had backed up toward the double row of jeeps on the opposite side of the open space in the hold.

Ken felt the rear fender of a jeep pressing against the back of his legs as Gerard's free hand whipped into his pocket and came out with a small flashlight. He snapped it on and aimed the beam at the boys. "Put out your light!" he ordered.

Torkling, on his feet now, staggered across the tilting deck to Gerard's side. Sandy's jarring thrust had almost knocked the breath out of him, and his voice was a rough rasp when he said, "Wait-Gerard! What are you going to do?"

Gerard ignored him and repeated his command. "Put that light out! Or do you want me to try shooting it out? I'm not really a crack shot-I might very well hit your hand instead. But if that's the way you want it--"

"Put it out!" Ken said quietly, urgently.

Gerard's deliberate manner seemed identical to the one they had come to know so well as fellow passengers on the *Helen Rogers*, but Ken saw that the manner now concealed a determination to let nothing interfere with plans which had worked so perfectly until this moment.

"Put it out!" Ken said a second time.

Sandy's thumb fumbled for the switch, found it, and flicked it off.

"That's better. Now, Torkling, I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to take care of these two-er-interruptions to an otherwise satisfactory sojourn in your hold."

"Take care of them? Just what do you mean by that?" There was a note of panicky fear in Torkling's voice. For the first time in the swiftly moving seconds since he had caught sight of that scrap of cloth, Ken felt real fear himself.

"What do I mean?" Gerard managed a brief smile in Torkling's direction without moving either the gun or the flashlight that he kept trained on the boys. "Surely the solution of our little problem is quite simple. There will merely be two more mysterious disappearances from the *Helen Rogers*."

"You're crazy!" Torkling gasped. "But you can't mean--"

"But I do."

The words were more terrifying because of the calmness with which they were delivered, and because of the faint and somehow inhuman smile which accompanied them.

Sandy moved instinctively closer to Ken.

"Stop! Don't move," Gerard warned the redhead. Then, in that same calm voice, he addressed his next words to Torkling again.

"Far from being crazy, my suggestion is entirely reasonable, as you should be able to realize yourself, without my having to point it out to you. After all, you are my source of information about the ridiculous foolhardiness of these two juvenile snoopers. In fact," Gerard added, "if half of what you've told me about them is correct, it's a wonder they haven't fallen overboard already, prowling about the ship in areas forbidden to passengers. So nobody should question for a moment the--"

"But you can't do it!" Torkling broke in. He'd made a fist of his powerful hand and was shaking it under Gerard's nose. "Sure I made a deal to help you get ashore in Valencia. That was bad enough! I must have been crazy myself to let you talk me into it. But murder! I'll have no part of that!"

"You'll have a part in everything that happens until I get safely ashore," Gerard told him quietly. "You're in this thing now too deeply to get out."

"Am I? We'll see about that!" As Torkling spoke, his fist opened into curved talonlike fingers that reached for Gerard's throat.

Gerard was too quick for him. Twisting out of the way of the reaching fingers, he raised his gun hand swiftly upward and then down again. The short gun barrel struck Torkling's forehead.

Sandy had moved in the split second during which Torkling's hand started toward Gerard's throat. Instinctively seizing the advantage of Gerard's distracted attention, the redhead's finger had jabbed at his flashlight button.

"Stupid fool!" Gerard was barking, as Torkling slumped to the deck, under the vicious blow of the gun.

Sandy's flashlight came on as the man spoke. With lightning speed Gerard turned toward it. Ken saw his features contorted into a mask of rage, eyes blinded by the beam, saw the gun that had struck down Torkling swinging around again toward Sandy and himself.

But the light that illuminated Gerard's menacing figure was no longer being held in Sandy's hand.

Sandy had hurled it forward with a powerful underhand throw. As if it were racing along its own light path, the heavy cylinder sped toward its target.

Gerard swerved, half raised his gun hand to ward off the rocketing missile.

Sandy drove his shoulder against Ken.

An instant later they heard the heavy flashlight crash against the forward bulkhead. Gerard had evaded its blow. But Sandy's substitute weapon had served a purpose. By the time it landed, Sandy had thrust Ken into the narrow space between the second and third jeeps in the row at their backs, and had pushed in behind him.

"I'll get you!" Gerard's shout was a bellow of rage. His calm had entirely vanished now, swept away by a murderous fury.

Breathless, gasping, Ken and Sandy pushed through into the aisle between the double row of jeeps, while the echo of Gerard's threat reverberated around the hold over the hollow sound of the ship's engines and the whining creak of wooden braces. They could no longer see Gerard from the darkness where they huddled, but the man's flashlight beam—a single wildly moving streak of light in the hold's blackness—told them where he was and how frantically he was searching for them.

There was no doubt in Ken's mind that Gerard would fire his gun—fire it twice—the instant he spotted Sandy and himself.

"He meant it! He's going to kill us!" Ken whispered hoarsely.

Even as he spoke, Gerard's flashlight stopped its frantic stabbing at the dark and settled down to a slower, more deadly probing. And the man who held it was moving now—moving inexorably toward the jeeps and the two figures he obviously knew were hidden behind them.

Ken tried to force his panicky thoughts into some kind of order. He and Sandy had to get help—that much was only too clear. But how could they signal for outside aid? And how could they evade Gerard's menacing gun until help of some kind was available? Torkling would try again to restrain Gerard, if the first officer regained consciousness. But Ken knew that might not happen for many long minutes, perhaps for many hours. And in the meantime—

The more logically Ken tried to think, the more, it seemed to him, the desperateness of their plight showed itself. Gerard had all the advantages in the unequal contest in which the boys suddenly found themselves. He had a flashlight. And he had a gun.

If they could hurl something at him that would put a halt to his slow, prowling search, or if they could even destroy his light or knock the gun out of his hands, they might have a chance of escaping from the hold with their lives.

But none of those feats was possible without some sort of missile. And they had none. Sandy had made good use of his flashlight, but now that object was beyond their reach, somewhere near the forward bulkhead. And neither he nor Ken had anything on their persons

which could be useful in this emergency. They needed something hard, something solid, something small enough to throw.

Moving backward beside Sandy in the aisle between the two rows of jeeps, step by cautious step, Ken touched the fender of one of the vehicles and wondered for a wild moment if he could rip off a piece of the metal and use it as a missile. The impossibility of the idea only proved to him how helpless they were, and how little he was accomplishing with his efforts to devise a scheme of rescue.

But his mind stubbornly reminded him that the jeeps were their only possible source of weapons. Was there no single part of a jeep which he could pull loose and use as a makeshift projectile?

Yes, there was!

In the same instant that the thought struck him, Ken was reaching into the jeep on his left and fumbling in the dark for a certain round and familiar shape.

It should be just below and to the right of the steering wheel.

His fingers stabbed at nothingness. But it must be there, he told himself.

Sandy was pulling at him, trying to draw him farther back along the aisle. The strong tug of his hand made Ken's search more difficult, but Ken couldn't risk trying to explain his idea to Sandy in words.

It must be there! He had seen what he was searching for when he and Sandy inspected the hold earlier with Torkling. It could not have been removed since then. Therefore it must still be in its place, somewhere very close to his hand. He knew he must be missing it by no more than a fraction of an inch as he moved his fingers back and forth, forward and back, in a frenzy of terrified haste.

And then his hand closed around what he sought -the solid, hard sphere that topped the jeep's gearshift lever.

Ken jerked himself free of Sandy's hold, ignoring the redhead's gasp of protest and alarm, and reached farther into the jeep. Swiftly he began to twist the sphere, to unscrew it from the shaft.

His heart was pounding, his breath was coming fast. It seemed to him that he had already twisted the cool, hard ball a thousand times when suddenly, at last, it came off in his fingers.

He felt Sandy close behind him, trying to pull at him again. The beam of Gerard's light, splintered and fragmented by the jeep windshields through which it passed as it sought them out, seemed frighteningly close. Ken pressed the round object into Sandy's hand, as the quickest way to explain his own actions, and communicate his scheme for their temporary defense. He knew Sandy would understand the sphere's possible purpose.

Sandy's empty left hand closed briefly around Ken's arm, in a gesture indicating that he realized where the sphere had come from,

and what could be done with it. But simultaneously Sandy left Ken's side, to step between two of the jeeps in the row nearer to Gerard. There, crouched low, Sandy waited until the man's light gave him a clear target. Then he hurled his arm forward.

His cramped position and the roll of the ship ruined Sandy's aim. The projectile struck the hood of the jeep directly in front of Gerard, ricocheted off and thumped solidly against the man's chest.

A direct blow on his chest would almost certainly have thrown him backward, perhaps knocked him unconscious. And if the ball had carried a little farther, and slightly to the right or to the left, it might have driven Gerard's light or his gun out of his hand.

But even the misdirected throw had its consequences. Gerard was thrown backward, staggering to keep his foothold on the tilting deck. His gun hand flew high in the air, as he fought for balance, and the gun went off.

Ken, already frantically unscrewing a second sphere from the next jeep in line, was aware of the explosion of the firearm only because he saw the muzzle flash. The tiny pop of the silenced gun had not even reached his ears, over the noises already existing in the hold while the *Helen Rogers* tossed in a high sea.

Suddenly Gerard's light went out, leaving the hold totally dark. Unable to guess, now, where Gerard was, Ken's only hope was that the man's fear of further missiles would slow his progress-would make him move more cautiously, perhaps even a little fearfully. Gerard must at least be puzzled as to where the boys had found a weapon, and wondering if they had more.

Ken fumbled his way to the next jeep, stowing his second loosened sphere temporarily in his pocket. He could feel Sandy move beside him and knew that the redhead was also collecting gearshift knobs from the jeeps in the opposite row. The blackness was protecting them, but it was also adding to the terrible suspense. They had not the slightest idea of Gerard's position. He might be thirty feet away from them-or only ten.

Ken stopped dead in his tracks for an instant, and then made himself go forward and thrust his hand into the next jeep. Gerard's flashlight hadn't burned out, he knew. If that was what had happened the beam would have weakened gradually. Gerard must have turned it off to protect himself from being hit. But how did he intend to find them? What trick did he plan to use? As Ken's fingers closed on another gearshift knob, and he began to twist it with terrible urgency, he sought frantically in his mind for some clue as to Gerard's next action.

An instant later he knew. The beam came on again, from somewhere behind them as before but also from above. It swept in a

swift circle-never quite touching the boys-and then went out again.

As clearly as if Gerard had told him what he was doing, Ken understood. The man had climbed on top of the hood of one of the jeeps, and was seeking them from there. And he was risking his flash only for brief intervals, in the hope that the boys would not have enough time to throw another missile at him before the light went out.

Again the light came on, flashing in a rapid circle from Gerard's raised position.

This time Ken was ready for it. Another knob was in his hand, and he was straightened up, arm back. He threw the knob a split second after the white arc began to move.

Ken could not follow the missile's flight. For a moment he thought his shot had gone completely wild. Then came Gerard's howl of anguish. The flashlight beam angled high, out of control.

Ken's heart seemed to skip a beat. Had he put Gerard out of action? Was this the moment to rush toward the gyrating light beam-the moment to attempt an attack?

The light blacked out abruptly. Then it appeared again, circled the hold quickly and flicked off once more.

Gerard was not out of action. He was just being even more cautious.

Straightening from his crouch, and reaching for still another gearshift knob, Ken realized how hopelessly one-sided their contest still was. Hurling small knobs at Gerard-if they could collect enough of them and were incredibly lucky-might eventually injure the man, or deprive him of his gun or light. But at any moment Sandy and himself might be caught by that sweeping beam of light, and caught also by the bullets that would follow along right after it.

Gerard needed only a single second of luck to contrive the double "mysterious disappearance" of which he had spoken so lightly to Torkling.

Ken snatched off the knob he had been automatically unscrewing and lurched several steps along the aisle, hands outstretched in the hope of touching Sandy. His fingers felt cloth and he clamped them around Sandy's hard-muscled arm. "We've got to separate. Take this-and this"-he thrust two of the missiles into Sandy's pockets-"and get to the other end of the aisle somewhere."

"But you-"

"I'll get more." Ken pushed at his friend and breathed a final few words into his ear. "Confuse him."

Sandy didn't argue further. He had grasped the importance of what Ken was suggesting. Swiftly he moved away.

Ken moved a few rapid steps in the other direction, dropped flat,

and slithered beneath a jeep. He banged his fist once, as if by accident, against the fender over his head and then crawled hastily through to the far side of the two rows of cars, to lie there a moment.

His ruse worked. He could see the fitful gleam of the flashlight as it passed and repassed the spot where he had stood a moment before. Gerard was exploring the area from which that metallic bang had sounded.

Ken could not see the spurt of the gun that time, but he knew it must have been fired in the instant before Gerard's light disappeared again, because the tinkle of glass reached his ears. Gerard had fired wildly at an unseen target, and had hit a windshield.

How many bullets did the man have in his gun? If, by similar tricks, they could persuade him to fire them all—

Ken inched his way along the floor until he had passed two vehicles. Then he got to his feet and cautiously reached over the door of the next jeep in the row to feel for that small round knob on the top of its gearshift lever.

The knob was gone.

The new hope he had felt only a moment before, when he had tricked Gerard, died abruptly, leaving Ken shaken. He realized that he no longer had any idea which jeeps he had robbed. Sandy too, of course, had removed some of the round handles.

Ken suddenly imagined himself fumbling in one vehicle after another, looking hopelessly for the one weapon he might use against Gerard, and being pinpointed by Gerard's light as he pursued his futile search.

Gerard's light came on again. The beam struck the hood of the car beside which Ken stood. Ken dropped flat, every muscle in his body quivering uncontrollably.

Then Gerard yelled, as if in sudden pain. His light careened in a wide arc high above Ken's head and slashed at the darkness at the far end of the aisle.

Sandy, Ken knew, must have aimed a projectile at Gerard and struck him—and Gerard had turned away from Ken to answer that attack from a new direction. Gerard had not lost his head. Once more the light went out again. But at least, Ken told himself, the enemy was being confused, just as he had hoped.

Swiftly, commanding his muscles to obey him, Ken crawled to the next jeep in the line, forced himself to his feet, and reached inside.

That time he found the knob. But it was tightly screwed in place, and he had managed to twist it only once when he saw the light come on and start to swing toward him. Once more he dropped flat.

His throat was dry. It was difficult to breathe. Suddenly he knew he was close to exhaustion, and that the next time he might not be

able to react swiftly enough to save himself.

And Sandy? Was he still safe? Ken felt his heart stop beating as he realized that Gerard's gun might already have found Sandy and struck him down with a silently speeding bullet.

"We need help." *"We need help."* The phrase began to repeat itself over and over in Ken's head.

But how could they get help? A rhythmic banging with some heavy instrument against the bulkhead might eventually attract attention in some other part of the ship. But long before that happened, Gerard would have caught the steady beat and aimed his gun at the spot.

Ken was lying prone, but a steep roll of the ship sent his whole body sideways. For a moment he lay helpless against the wheel of a jeep, overwhelmed by the odds against Sandy and himself—the unsteadiness of the deck on which they had to fight for footing, the darkness broken only by those flashes of light which signaled danger, the unseen enemy whose weapon was so silent and so deadly.

But they couldn't give up! He pressed his hands against the floor, forced himself to his knees, and came erect again.

Instantly he ducked down once more, having caught a glimmer of light somewhere to the right.

But crouched against the jeep's door he saw the light again, in his mind's eye, and realized that it had been a glow, not a long beam.

What did it mean? What was diffusing Gerard's flash?

Could it be smoke?

Ken knew by now that Gerard must be mad. But could the man be so insane that he was deliberately setting the ship afire rather than face capture?

Frantically Ken reached inside the jeep to twist at the stubborn knob. If there was a fire in the hold he would bang for help even if—

Gerard's flashlight was still on, but its beam was so blunted now that Ken could not tell whether it was aimed at him or not. It seemed only a hazy blur of white floating in the air.

Ken sneezed convulsively. And in the same instant, as if the sneeze had shaken his wits back into place, he knew that Gerard's light was not being blurred by smoke. The haze around it was white—the haze of flour.

Sandy had ripped open one of the flour bags in the hold and was tossing the white stuff into the air!

And Ken understood the reason for Sandy's move even as he recognized it for what it was.

As clearly as if they were being spoken aloud in his ear at that moment, he could hear again the words of the chief engineer the day he was explaining to the passengers the ship's fire-protection system.

"Air is being sucked out of each hold constantly," Sloan had said,

“and passed before electric eyes. The slightest trace of smoke in the air affects these sensitive devices and they trigger an alarm system that tells us exactly where the fire is.”

Would flour in the air also trigger that system?

The question fled from Ken’s mind before he could try to answer it. The glow of light was bearing down on him, moving as steadily in his direction as if Gerard were being drawn to him by a string.

Ken’s body contracted, in the start of a dive for the deck. But somehow his hand remained on the knob and he continued to stand upright, struggling to detach the potential weapon beneath his fingers.

If Gerard was heading in his direction, he told himself, that meant that Sandy would be safe temporarily.

The knob came free. He hurled it. A faint bang told him that it had struck metal somewhere. But the blob of light kept coming at him without pause.

Ken backed up alongside the jeep, past its hood, hand outstretched behind him to feel for the fender of the next car in the row.

There was no next jeep. His hand encountered instead the flat surface of a bulkhead.

He was cornered. And the light was still moving toward him.

He stepped to his right. The ship tilted steeply in the same direction just as his foot struck against a cleat in the floor. He went down sideways, his leg cramped awkwardly beneath him.

In the center of the bobbing white glow of light there appeared a spurt of orange-and-red flame.

Ducking his head, but helpless to move any other part of his body, Ken waited.

It seemed to him that the shot from Gerard’s gun had somehow set fire to all the flour now billowing around the hold, because suddenly it was all visible. No longer was there a small glow of whiteness. Now the entire hold, so far as he could see, seemed to be filled with a white luminescent light. Was he imagining it?

Vaguely Ken told himself that he must be slipping into unconsciousness. He had not felt Gerard’s shot strike him, but there seemed no other explanation for the trick his eyes must be playing on him.

And now they played another trick. A dark mass, like a dim shadow, seemed to fall through the air toward the spot where Gerard’s gun had blazed an instant before. There was a dull thud. And a geyser-like tower of almost solid white erupted upward from the deck.

“Got him!” The shout was Sandy’s.

“You-!” Even in the single muffled syllable Ken recognized Gerard’s voice.

And suddenly Ken’s mind cleared. Sandy, he realized, had hurled a

flour bag at Gerard, and followed it up by throwing himself at the man. And Gerard had not been overcome instantly. He was still able to speak.

Ken flung his body over, to free his legs, lurched to his feet and drove through the white cloud toward the spot where the voices had sounded.

The first object that became visible to him was an uplifted arm and a hand clutching a gun. The gun started downward. Ken grabbed for it. His fingers clamped around Gerard's wrist and twisted hard. The fingers relaxed. The gun clattered to the deck.

Sandy hurled a flour bag, then flung himself at Gerard

"Thanks!" Sandy panted. "You can let go now. I-I really have got him this time."

He was pulling Gerard's struggling body erect as he spoke, one big hand clutching the front of the man's shirt. Gerard's clawing fingers reached toward Sandy's eyes, but Sandy held him out at the length of his own long arm.

"You-1" Gerard said again, choking with baffled rage.

Sandy measured him briefly and then drove his free hand, balled into a fist, hard against the clenched jaw.

Gerard sagged, his arms falling limply against his side. Sandy eased him down to the deck, a dead weight.

Only then did the two boys become aware of several voices shouting downward at them.

They came, Ken realized, from the hatchway above, which must have been opened at some time within the past few seconds. And the glow throughout the hold meant, of course, that the overhead lights had been turned on from the switch above decks, some moments before.

Ken could feel his flour-caked face split in a grin. "I kept thinking we needed help," he said. "Now we've got it."

CHAPTER XI

CLEAR SAILING

Captain Chisholm leaned over his desk to refill the boys' coffee cups. "Help yourselves," he urged, gesturing toward a plate heaped with sandwiches. "You haven't even made a dent in that pile yet."

Sandy grinned. "I think I swallowed too much flour to be really hungry," he said, but he stretched out a flour-whitened arm toward the plate.

Almost two hours had passed since Second Mate Green and his emergency crew opened the inspection hatch of hold No. 5 and shouted down into the billowing whiteness below. They had been a busy two hours.

Gerard and Torkling, both still unconscious, had been hauled up the ladder to the deck and locked in separate cabins in the crews' quarters, under guard. Both had revived shortly afterward. And though Gerard had maintained a sullen frozen silence, Torkling had talked. He had poured out a story which Captain Chisholm listened to with horror, but little of which was surprising to the boys.

Afterward, Ken had hurriedly put together a report which Mike Ingham was now sending off to Global News in New York. And Sandy had used his larger and undamaged camera to shoot a dozen pictures of the captain's two prisoners, the flour-covered hold, and the highly ingenious packing case that had served Gerard for a hide-out. Sandy's undeveloped films now lay, neatly packaged, on the captain's desk, ready to be put aboard a plane as soon as the *Helen Rogers* docked at Valencia.

When Ken and Sandy finally sank down in chairs opposite Captain Chisholm, they had been almost too exhausted to speak. But coffee had revived them somewhat. And the sea had grown calmer as daylight approached, though Ken had become aware of that only when he realized that his full coffee cup seemed in no danger of sloshing over.

"Getting a little quieter," he murmured gratefully, glad because it was no longer necessary to struggle to keep erect in a chair.

Captain Chisholm looked at him with the same wisely amused glance that had first made Ken think the ship's master resembled Pop Allen. "It is that," he agreed. "And about time too."

"Yes, sir," Ken agreed, smiling back. "I guess you'll be glad when this voyage is over," he added.

"I will," Captain Chisholm admitted. "It'll be the first time I ever came into port with two men locked up aboard. I hope it'll be the last.

A knock sounded on the door which led from his office to the bridge.

"Come in," the captain said briskly.

It was Second Mate Green who entered. "Just sighted the pilot boat's lights, sir. She should be alongside in less than half an hour."

"Police and American consul on board?" Captain Chisholm asked.

"Yes, sir. We got that message by radio just a minute before we picked up the lights."

"Good. They can't join us too soon to suit me. I'll be glad to see the end of Gerard and Torkling both." His face darkened, and his voice grew stern. "Especially Torkling. The man's a disgrace to his profession."

"I can see why you feel that way, sir," Ken said. "Sandy and I know what he's guilty of. And we have a sort of private grudge against him besides, for following us down into the hold and knocking us out to prevent us from getting those names, and then pretending he was rescuing us from that case he said crashed down on our heads. But, after all, he did try to rescue us from Gerard, and we can't forget that."

"I know," Captain Chisholm's look did not lighten. "I'll mention that in my report to the authorities. You probably will too. No doubt it will weigh in his favor when the time comes. But to think that a man I sailed with-a man I trusted-" He broke off abruptly and turned to Green. "You ready to answer the authorities' questions when they come aboard?" he asked gruffly. "You'll have to make a report too, you know. After all, you're the man who saw Gerard's dummy go overboard-and you led the party down into the hold."

"I can tell them what I know," Green answered, "but I'm afraid it isn't much. Why, I don't even know how that dummy did go overboard. I know it was a trick-that somebody pushed it or threw it. But I wasn't a dozen feet away at the time and I still have no idea how it was worked."

"That's right." Chisholm nodded. "You weren't in on that session with Torkling. He told us how it was managed. He said-Don't you want some coffee, man? We might as well all be comfortable in here until the pilot boat arrives. There are a few spots in the whole rigmarole I'm not too clear on myself."

"Thanks." Green filled an empty cup and sat down on the leather couch along the cabin wall.

"The dummy trick was simple," the captain explained to him. "The figure was set up ahead of time, of course-bent over the rail and with a string attached to its head. The string ran down beneath the lower part of the rail and back across the deck. Torkling loosened the awning, knowing you'd come out to investigate the noise, and then

took the other end of the string and hid in the shadow behind the stack and waited. When he saw you he yanked the string and pulled the head down far enough to tip the dummy overboard. He let go of the string, of course, and that went overboard too.”

“Hmm. Neat and foolproof.” Green nodded admiringly. “And I suppose the radiograms triggered everything-that Gerard was all set to act as soon as they arrived?”

“It’s all so complicated,” Captain Chisholm muttered. “I think you two have it a lot straighter in your minds than I do,” he added to the boys. “Gerard was waiting for some kind of a message to reach the ship, wasn’t he, so that it would seem he had a reason to commit suicide? But suppose he hadn’t learned about my message or yours?”

“It’ll probably be clearer to all of us when Gerard talks-if he ever does,” Ken answered. “But from what Torkling said, and from what we’ve figured out, it seems that Gerard expected to receive some kind of a message himself. That’s why he deliberately left that note unpaid, so he’d receive a radiogram about it. Then he’d ‘disappear.’ You’d find the message in his cabin afterward and it would lead to investigation. And the investigation would prove he was in serious trouble with his accounts; that he was a man facing complete disgrace and had apparently just taken the easy way out before the facts became public.”

“But what happened was that his unpaid note set off an investigation right away,” Sandy added. “So Gerard didn’t get the radiogram he expected. Instead you got one, Captain, and so did we. Gerard must have been surprised. But he was smart enough to see that his scheme with the dummy could still serve his purpose, and he simply went ahead with it.”

“And it very nearly did work,” Green mused. “If you two-“

Sandy interrupted him. “It was only Ken who got suspicious,” he pointed out. “Not both of us. Breaking a thermos bottle in his rush to carry out his scheme was the only mistake Gerard really made. But old eagle eye here saw those pieces of glass and got to thinking.”

“Don’t remind me of the so-called thinking I’ve been doing the past couple of days,” Ken said, his face red. “The thing I particularly don’t like to remember is thinking the captain might have sent us those sleeping pills.”

“Sleeping pills! Captain Chisholm?” Green stared in turn at each of the three other faces in the room.

It was Captain Chisholm who answered him. His eyes were twinkling. “I’ll admit it gave me quite a turn when I first heard about it too,” he said. “But then they told me how they’d reasoned-and, after all, it was sleeping pills they were given. I’d told Torkling to send them some aspirin, you see, for their headaches. But Torkling gave

Angelo sleeping pills instead. And reminded the boy, of course, to say the pills were being sent by my request. If I'd been in Ken and Sandy's place, I'd have been suspicious of myself too."

"But why give them sleeping pills at all?" Green asked.

"Because he was afraid the boys would cause such a rumpus when we docked, not having been able to settle the Gerard problem to their own satisfaction, that the American consul would insist on every large crate being opened then and there. And that, of course, would have ruined everything."

"Yes, I can see that." Green took a thoughtful swallow of coffee. "Of course," he added, "I don't understand how Gerard planned to get himself safely ashore in any case. That crate of his is addressed to an individual. It certainly would have been opened on the dock by the customs inspector, wouldn't it?"

"That kept bothering Sandy and me," Ken told him, "even when we were sure of what Gerard was up to. But with Torkling's help it's all straightened out now-and in about the way we'd figured. Gerard's crate was to be left on the dock until called for. Of course the dock would be guarded-you know that better than we do. But I suppose any guards can be evaded, if their method of inspection is studied ahead of time. So, according to Torkling, it was going to be easy for Gerard to get out of the crate after dark and slide over the edge of the dock into a rowboat that Torkling would bring alongside at a specified hour."

"Hmm. That might sound neat and foolproof too -to somebody who doesn't understand the regulations for foreigners in Spain," Green said. "But what about papers and documents? Why, Gerard couldn't even have taken a room at a hotel without showing his passport. And by that time his passport would belong to a man officially declared dead."

"Ken hit that part of the story right on the head," Sandy told him.

"Not quite," Ken pointed out. "I missed one entire step in Gerard's plan."

"You were close enough," Sandy said. He turned to Green.

"Gerard's crate-I guess you know this-was addressed to a Randolph Jones, care of the Hotel Valencia." Green nodded and Sandy went on. "Well, Randolph was the new identity Gerard had invented for himself."

"One of the new identities," Ken corrected. "He had a phony passport made out in that name, and when he went ashore in Torkling's rowboat, he'd become Mr. Jones, complete with necessary papers. As Jones, wearing the false mustache that Randolph Jones wears in his passport picture, he'd come down to the wharf in a couple of days and claim his crate, so there'd be no loose ends to trip him up."

Green looked puzzled. "You learned about that part from Torkling? Seems foolish for Gerard to have told him so much."

"Foolish like a fox!" Sandy said. "What Torkling didn't know, and none of us would know it either, except that Captain Chisholm found the documents when he had Gerard searched, is that Gerard had still another phony passport. This one was made out to a Wilbur Dike, and all the embezzled money was deposited in European banks under that name."

Probably Gerard-or Jones-planned to leave Valencia within a few days. And when he left, both those identities would disappear forever. After that, there'd be nobody left but the wealthy Mr. Dike-a man who wouldn't be connected in any way with the original Gerard, or with Torkling either."

Green was shaking his head as if in a daze. "What a complicated scheme! And I was thinking the man was pretty clever, just because I'd seen the way he'd rigged up that crate."

"That was clever enough," Ken agreed. "Did you notice the way he'd packed that furniture so that the crate seemed full, but so that there was really room for him to get in and out? And the dummy screws would have fooled anybody. They certainly fooled us-and we looked at it carefully enough."

"We certainly did!" Green sat up straighter. "How was he going to manage for air inside there, anyway? Remember how we examined those things for air holes?"

Ken grinned in reluctant admiration of the man who had so nearly cost Sandy and himself their lives. "That was the neatest part of the whole business. In the first place, there *were* air holes-in the bottom of the crate."

"But they couldn't do him any good," Green protested. "The crate was sitting flat on the floor-I'm sure of that."

Ken nodded. "That's right. But he wasn't depending on those holes for air while he was down in the hold. They were to keep him supplied while he was waiting out the necessary hours on the wharf-and Torkling was to see to it that on the wharf the crate was set up on timbers or something, that would leave the holes exposed. But while the crate was on the ship he just opened that trick panel of his a couple of inches, and got as much air as he needed."

Green's jaw dropped. "Neat is certainly right! But that panel wasn't open when we were inspecting that hold! I'll take my oath on that."

"Of course it wasn't." Captain Chisholm spoke up. "The man could hear the inspection hatch being opened, couldn't he? He'd even see the lights come on in the hold before that, in plenty of time for him to close up his panel before anyone even opened up the hatch. And of course the crate was big enough to give him whatever air he'd need

for the duration of an inspection.” The captain shook his head. “I’m willing to admit I was never so taken in in my life,” he said. “But at least I was taken in by a really clever scoundrel-not by a stupid one. In fact, he was so clever that he’d have gotten away with it entirely if it hadn’t been for a couple of stubborn young men who stuck to their guns in spite of everything, including a certain lack of co-operation from the captain of the *Helen Rogers*.”

Ken leaned forward. “Honestly, sir,” he said, “nobody but yourself could ever call it lack of co-operation.’ I don’t really know why you listened to us at all-our idea sounded so crazy. But you did listen to us, and gave us plenty of opportunity to prove to you we were right. It was our own fault we didn’t prove it. In fact,” he added, grinning, “there were a good many minutes when I thought myself that we’d proved we must be wrong.”

“And of course we were wrong-about several things,” Sandy added. “About you, for example.” He looked over at the second mate.

“Me? You mean you thought I was implicated in this thing?” Green demanded in an astonished voice.

“Don’t sound so horrified,” the captain told him, eyes twinkling. “I guess if I can stand the knowledge that I was suspect, you can too. Fact is, they had mighty good reason to suspect you-you were the obvious candidate for Gerard’s confederate. Nobody but you had a better chance to throw that dummy overboard, and then sound the alarm.”

“Well, I’ll be-!” Green stared at the captain, and then at the two boys, and finally burst into laughter. “Well, I guess I had it coming to me for thinking you two were not very bright.” He grinned at the boys. “I did think that there for a time, you know. And, as a matter of fact, it really wasn’t very bright of you to go sneaking down into the hold last night.”

“But we didn’t intend to,” Sandy assured him hastily. “We just wanted to stick the camera in and take a picture, to see if it would give us evidence of what we thought was going on.”

Green looked skeptical.

“He’s telling the truth, Green.” Captain Chisholm nodded decisively to his second mate. “Torkling cleared that up for us. So you see,” he concluded, “we all made mistakes, even you, Mr. Mate.”

“Yes, sir.” Green got to his feet, touching his forehead in a mock-respectful salute to the boys. “And you’ll be telling me I’ve made another one, sir,” he added to the captain, “if I’m not on the bridge when the pilot boat pulls alongside.”

“You’re right. I will. Get along to your job.”

When Green had left the room, Captain Chisholm looked out of a porthole at the thin line that was the coast of Spain. “And I suppose,”

he said, "I'd better get ready to face a barrage of questions myself." He let his eyes sweep over the boys, slumped in exhaustion. "Tell you what," he went on. "I can arrange it so you don't have to see anyone until this afternoon. That'll give you time to get some sleep."

"Sounds wonderful," Ken said. He sat up straighter and managed to pull his shoulders back. "But we've got to send Global News a follow-up story. They'll want to know what the consul's going to do with Gerard and Torkling, and what--"

"And I'll need more pictures too," Sandy cut in. He got to his feet and tried to look briskly businesslike.

Captain Chisholm shook his head. "I should have known better than to suggest it." He put on his cap and his eyes twinkled at them from beneath the peak. "Since you won't take advantage of my offer," he said with mock severity, "I'll give you fifteen minutes to make yourselves presentable. I'll expect you here then, prepared to report to the American consul."

"Yes, sir," Ken replied, his grin matching the captain's.

"And please try not to give the impression that what happened on this trip is normal on Adams Line ships. We try to convince people that an ocean voyage with us is restful."

"It was a restful trip," Sandy said quickly. "All but the last couple of days, anyway. And--" He broke off at the sound of a knock on the door.

"Come in," the captain said.

Mike Ingham entered. "Just got a radiogram for Holt and Allen," he said to the captain. "The steward said they were in here with you, sir," he said. He handed a piece of paper to Ken.

The boys drew close together to read the message, and as they scanned the few lines they both grinned widely.

"It's from my father," Ken explained. "From Amsterdam."

"Read it aloud," Sandy suggested.

"Welcome to Spain," Ken read. "Hope you learned to appreciate benefits of quiet peaceful ocean trip. See you soon,"

"I'm afraid your father is in for a surprise," Captain Chisholm said dryly, "when he learns how quiet and peaceful your trip really was."

"It takes a lot to surprise Dad," Ken replied. "He's been a reporter too long for that."

But even reporters are capable of being surprised, as Ken and Sandy discovered, not long afterward, when they were deep in the tangled confusion that became famous as *The Mystery of the Telltale Fingerprints*. [The next book in the series was renamed to *The Mystery of the Invisible Enemy*.]

THE END

THE MYSTERY OF THE SHATTERED GLASS

A KEN HOLT Mystery. No. 13

By Bruce Campbell